



LA BEATA

A TUSCAN ROMEO & JULIET

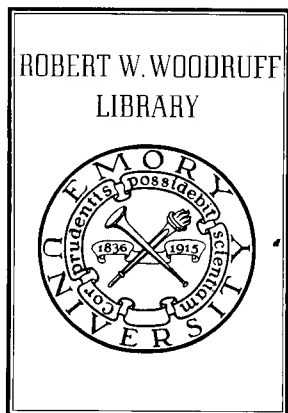
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LA BEATA.

A TUSCAN ROMEO AND JULIET.

BY
T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF
" BEPPO THE CONSCRIPT,"
" LINDISFARN CHASE,"
" MARIETTA,"
ETC. ETC.

NEW EDITION.

LONDON:
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CONTENTS.



LA BEATA.

	PAGE
CHAP. I.—A STUDIO IN THE VIA DELL' AMORE	1
II.—THE WIDOW LETI AND HER DAUGHTER	12
III.—DANGER !	26
IV.—TITO'S IDEA	31
V.—MAESTRO BORSOLI'S STUDIO	40
VI.—THE PATRINGHAMS	54
VII.—A VISIT TO THE VIA DELL' AMORE	66
VIII.—LAUDADIO BENINCASA, THE WAX-CHANDLER	81
IX.—DISTINGUISHED PATRONAGE FOR SAINTS AND ARTISTS	96
X.—THE RETURN TO THE OLD HOME	113
XI.—NEW YEAR'S DAY IN THE VIA DEL CORSO	132
XII.—PATRONAGE	148
XIII.—THE PORTRAIT OF SANTA FILOMENA	163
XIV.—THE PROCESSION AND THE TRIUMPH	176

	PAGE
CHAP. XV.—TINA'S LETTER.	188
XVI.—THE CALL OF THE BELL	197
XVII.—THE MISERICORDIA	211
XVIII.—CAMALDOLI	225
XIX.—THE FLIGHT	233
XX.—CONCLUSION	246

A TUSCAN ROMEO AND JULIET.

CHAP. I.—THE BARDI AND THE BUONDELMONTI	259
II.—A MOTHER AND SON	272
III.—THE AMBUSH	285
IV.—THE WOOING.	297
V.—THE FAILURE	309
VI.—THE SUCCESS	320

LA BEATA.

CHAPTER I.

A STUDIO IN THE VIA DELL' AMORE.

It does not follow that all the world who know Florence, "that city of flowers, and flower of cities," are equally cognisant of the *Via dell' Amore*. Not only is a six months' residence in the fair city quite compatible with entire ignorance of the locality in question, but it is very possible that a long life might be passed on the banks of the Arno without making the oldest inhabitant acquainted with it. Many Florentines too may be aware of the existence of such a street, and yet be ignorant of its somewhat romantic name; for the Tuscans have an inveterate habit of disregarding the official municipal nomenclature of their venerable cities, and adhering to ancient traditional names or nick-names. Thus a house or shop which modern precision would define as number so-and-so in such-and-such a street, the genuine Florentine cockney, born and bred beneath the shadow of Giotto's *campanile*, persists in describing as "near St. This or St. That," "by the side of such a *Loggia*," "opposite *Palazzo* So-and-So," or "hard by this or that Corner;"—names of which the origin must be sought probably in Florentine history of the 13th or 14th century,—the *Loggia*, or open arcade, having long since ceased to exist; the *Palazzo* being named from some long since extinct family; and the Corner having been so nicknamed from some all-but-forgotten event or individual.

It may be, therefore, that the house in the *Via dell' Amore*, to which I wish to introduce the reader, was known to the generation of Florentines now gradually passing from the scene under some such appellation; for the dwelling, though the street is an obscure one, was once not altogether destitute of pretension. The city of Florence is, and has always been, wholly without the institution of a West End. There is no exclusively aristocratic quarter. Fine old mansions, with grand historic names, are found in all parts of the city, surrounded by the dwellings of every class of the population. The fact is an interesting indication of the old thoroughly democratic constitution of society, which gained for Florence the appellation of "the most republican of republics."

The "*Via dell' Amore*" is in the parish of San Lorenzo;—in the "*Popolo di San Lorenzo*," to use the popular and ancient Florentine phrase;—the tribe of San Lorenzo, as the word *popolo* can only be in this case translated—a phrase characteristic of the times, when every local and territorial division was understood to imply a bond of union among its inhabitants, and a separating disunion from all other neighbours. It is not distant from the historical old church which gives its name to the parish; and though the streets are crowded and narrow in that part of the old city, the fourth-story windows of the house in question look out on the red dome of that chapel at the east end of the church under which the Medici sleep, apparently at only a few yards' distance. It is to that fourth story that the reader must be invited to climb. But the stair is neither a difficult nor a dirty one. The house is evidently inhabited by respectable tax-paying citizens. Everything is in decent order and good repair; and the stone stair is broad and easy in its acclivity even to the top. The number of these stone stairs, however, would seem to a Londoner or a Parisian far more than enough to carry him to a fourth story. But Florentine houses are not divided into a number of horizontal slices, each but a little thicker than the average height of a man. To reach the

fourth floor of a good old-fashioned dwelling-house in Florence, it is necessary to ascend in all probability some fifty feet.

Visitors to the studio of Filippo Lonari had to climb at least to that altitude; and it must have been extremely provoking to all those unsuccessful climbers, who had covered the door and the surrounding white wall with announcements of their visit in pencil or charcoal,—in many cases accompanied by a caricature portrait of the absent artist,—to have made the ascent in vain.

Specially such may be supposed to have been the case if all those stairs had been mounted on a very hot Sunday afternoon in August, as the reader must, necessarily for the purposes of our story, be invited at least in imagination to do. But he need not, like those other flesh and blood visitors, be kept waiting while a sweet silvery voice, very unlike that which might be supposed to come from the chest of Signor Filippo Lonari, demands in answer to the little tinkle produced by pulling a bit of twine passed through a gimlet-hole in the door, “Chi è?”—Who is there? The applicant for admission replies by the regulation open sesame, “Amici!”—Friends!—and the door is forthwith opened. The timid Florentine housewife, often alone in her dwelling, seems to fancy that she has thus provided against all danger of admitting an unwelcome intruder. But it is difficult to comprehend what should prevent the most evil-minded cut-throat from using the well-known talisman. The simple women seem to imagine that their precautionary question would be at once responded to by the answer “Thieves!” if thieves they were who knocked.

The sweet silver voice, however, would probably not have deemed it necessary to go through this customary little drama on the present occasion; for its owner was protected by the presence, not only of the master of the dwelling, whom she of the silver voice was wont to consider an amply sufficient guardian against all sublunary evils and dangers whatever, but by that of another member of

the stronger sex also. Before proceeding, however, to make acquaintance with the inmates of the studio in the Via dell' Amore, it will be well to obtain a somewhat clear idea of the place itself.

It was visible at a glance that the painter's home consisted of one room only. But it was a very large and a very lofty one. Many a snug suite of apartments in London or in Paris contains far fewer cubic feet of space than Filippo Lonari's one room. The occupiers, moreover, of such snug and comparatively costly lodgings would, especially if artists, be very glad to purchase, at the cost of a double rent, the pure, unbroken light which streamed into the Florentine painter's studio from a very large window high in the wall to the north, through which the eye saw nothing but a wide tract of azure sky. Another window, at right angles to this, and placed lower in the wall, without the slightest regard to symmetry of arrangement, gave a view, over the tops of the intervening houses, of the red dome of San Lorenzo. Both windows were void of curtains, but were furnished; the smaller and lower one with a bit of matting in the guise of blind on the outside, and the large north window with a huge screen of paper stretched on a light wooden frame, fixed by hinges to the upper part of the window-frame, and so contrived as by means of a string and a pulley to admit the light in whatever degree and at whatever angle might be wished. The matting blind and the paper screen are both entirely drawn down on the present occasion, for the artist is not at work; and the main object is to exclude as much as possible of the blazing August sunshine and heated outer air, which is making the apartment, large and airy as it is, feel almost like an oven. This heat in summer, and cold quite proportionably excessive in winter, are the great drawbacks to the eligibility of the residence. And the cause of these evils is but too apparent at the first glance. The huge room has no ceiling. The naked tiles of the roof, and the rafters which support them, lie in a gently sloping position over the wide extent of it. A ceiling would increase the

comfort of the dwelling a hundred per cent., raise the rent perhaps ten per cent., and yield twenty per cent. of profit on the outlay to the proprietor. But the proprietor is too short of ready money to incur the expense, and the tenant would certainly shrink from any increase of his rent. So the heat and the cold are endured patiently among other irremediable evils. Some attempt, indeed, has been made to alleviate the discomfort in that corner of the room which has been partitioned off by an arrangement of screens, and serves for a bed-chamber. A kind of canopy of matting has been suspended above this portion of the habitation.

In the middle of the room, well under the light from the great north window, there is a low raised platform, some ten feet square, covered with an old bit of red baize. In the centre of this a lay figure is standing, draped into some resemblance to the well-known figure of Dante in the recently discovered fresco on the chapel wall of the Bargello at Florence. At a little distance is an easel with a large canvas turned with its front downwards. The furniture is very scanty in quantity, and quaint and heterogeneous rather than shabby in quality. At a little distance from the platform, and with its back to the larger window, but at a considerable distance from the wall, is a sofa with the slender, fluted, gilt legs of the time of the first French empire. Its green silk covering and cushions are in tolerably decent repair. Before it stands one of those oblong tables of ebony, ornamented with inlaid ivory, which are so frequently met with in Florence, and of which so many have been carried thence to fit up *rococo* drawing-rooms in Paris and London. A couple of coarse white plates, a broken crust of bread, and an empty flask, with its old discoloured rush casing, are on the table, and contrast strangely with its handsome polished surface and costly elegance. A few rush-bottomed chairs are ranged round the far back walls of the room; but in the vicinity of the easel, the sofa, and the table, there are two chairs of a kind which seems to have constituted the only tolerably comfortable seat known to the world three hundred years ago.

They are made, somewhat on the principle of a camp-stool, of solid old walnut-wood, with a stout bit of once red leather for the seat, and another broad strip of the same material once richly gilt for the back. There is also a small walnut-wood chair with a high carved back, belonging to the same epoch; astride which, with his arms resting on that high back, sits the master of the house. The brick floor of the great, almost barn-like room is totally uncovered, and—at least to English eyes—adds to the appearance of inhabitable discomfort. In winter, however, a piece of thick matting would supply the place of carpet in that part of the room in which the above-mentioned objects are congregated. And in summer the bare bricks are for more than one reason preferable to wooden flooring.

All round the walls, which are ornamented with large red panels in stucco-coloured frames painted in fresco, is hung, and otherwise arranged, a miscellaneous collection of all that not unpicturesque lumber generally found in artists' studios. There are casts of heads, and arms, and legs, *torsos* and busts in plaster of Paris, some placed on brackets, some simply pendent from a nail in the wall. There are unfinished canvases in every stage of progress, representing subjects of every description. The majority of these, however, are on the floor, with their faces—unpleasantly commemorative of failure or want of perseverance—turned to the wall. There are sketches in white or coloured chalk on coarse blue or brown paper, hung without the slightest regard to symmetry on all the walls. They are memoranda of ideas to the artist; but to any other eye the strangest phantasmagoric nightmare procession of distorted limbs and caricatured features imaginable.

The only conscious attempt at ornament is manifested in the centre of the wall opposite the entrance. There stands one of those well-known carved walnut-wood chests, in which the Florentine brides of three centuries since carried with them their outfit of braveries; no fashions of a season, to be re-fashioned or become a lady's-maid's perquisites the

next; but jewelled brocades, and armour-like gold-woven tissues, destined to figure fifty years later in the fair owner's last will and testament. Nor have these honestly wrought handiworks of fingers, gone to dust three hundred years ago, even yet reached entirely that inevitable consummation; for on the wall, above the handsome chest, is suspended a piece, some four feet square, of still unfaded rich crimson silk, with broken remains of golden embroidery around it. Small doubt but that that piece of silk has rustled in the saloons of some one of the earlier Medicean princes. Now it serves as a background for a couple of halberds and two pair of ancient swords, its contemporaries, and a helmet, surviving from a still earlier generation, arranged trophywise on the wall of the artist's garret. Above these is a large cast of the well-known bust of Michael Angelo, with a withered wreath of bay-leaves on its plaster brow.

It is perhaps not strictly correct to say that these objects form the only conscious attempt at ornament in the artist's chamber; for on the old green silk sofa with the gilded spindle legs is reposing the well-cared-for person of Tito Fanetti, the friend, brother artist, and comrade of the master of the apartment. And Tito clearly embodies a conscious attempt at being ornamental. His small, plump, well-to-do looking person is encased in a pair of white trousers, supported by a red silk scarf round the waist in lieu of braces, and a jauntily cut and abundantly laced velveteen coat, which, being unbuttoned, discloses the absence of any waistcoat, and the presence of a perfectly clean and elaborately embroidered, but not very fine coloured shirt. His good-humoured fresh-coloured face is ornamented by a carefully got up light-brown moustache and tuft on the chin, as well as by an intelligent laughing blue eye. And the round, rather bullet-headed, but not badly developed brow, is surmounted by a jauntily set on straw hat with a broad black ribbon band. The entire appearance, in short, of Tito Fanetti bespeaks a degree of well-being and prosperity which is in unpleasant contrast

with that of his companions, and with the general air of their abode.

"It won't do, Pippo!" exclaimed the more successful artist, springing from his recumbent position on the sofa, and flinging on the brick floor the end of the cigar he had been smoking; "it won't do, Pippo. It is not right, and all the talking in the world won't make it right! I don't want to be hard on you . . ."

"And I am ready to make all excuses for you!" retorted Pippo, whose attitude on the old-fashioned, carved chair has been described. He was a taller and far handsomer man than his spruce and prosperous friend. The latter might have passed for an Englishman. But the genuine Italian type of face of Filippo or Pippo Lonari could not be mistaken. It was one of those classical, oval, regular-featured, olive-complexioned faces with well-shaped, liquid brown eyes, and the usual abundance of black whisker, moustache, and beard, which are so undeniably handsome, but so difficult to remember, and which seem all so like to one another; a monotony of appearance which is doubtless caused by the absence of expression arising from the concealment of the mouth, that tell-tale feature which more than any other reveals the moral nature of the man. Pippo was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, a costume which the heat of that August afternoon under the tiles rendered agreeable and excusable. But the shirt was neither as smart nor as irreproachably clean as that of his friend. His long legs, which were stretched out in front of him on either side of the chair he was bestriding, were clothed in a pair of linen trousers, on which a similar remark might be made. And the natty smart red scarf at the waist was also wanting.

"I am ready to make all excuse for you too!" retorted he, in answer to Tito's objurgation; "it is so easy to preach and play the mentor, when one has just had a good dinner, and all goes well, and it must be extremely agreeable too, I suppose; though I never had an opportunity of trying the sensation. But I make allowance for temptation, and don't want, as you say, to be hard on you."

"I avail myself of your indulgence," returned Tito, with undiminished good humour, "and proceed with my sermon. I say that the artist, who paints a picture in imitation of the old masters, with the knowledge that the dealer for whom he executes the commission will sell it as an old picture, is only one degree less dishonest than the dealer."

"What nonsense to talk of dishonesty!" rejoined Pippo. "Where can be the dishonesty of executing to the best of one's ability a commission entrusted to one? What have I to do with what my employer does with his purchase afterwards?"

"I don't call it honest," persisted the other, "to be so far the accomplice of a fraud as to furnish the means without which it could not be committed. All such things are, moreover, exceedingly injurious to the dignity of the profession, and so do mischief to us all."

"I'll tell you what it is, friend Tito. It's my opinion that a decent dinner—say a leg and wing of a fowl and half a flask of good Chianti—is essential to a proper appreciation of the dignity of the profession. No doubt, you feel it thoroughly. I'll be bound you have nourished the noble sentiment this very day with a good Milanese rice soup, and a prime cut from a fore-quarter of lamb in addition to the fowl and the Chianti. A nice morsel of Parmesan, a couple of peaches from Pian di Ripoli, and a cup of coffee to finish with, have just brought you up to the pitch of professional dignity proper for lecturing a poor devil, who can hardly keep body and soul together. My dinner to-day was a morsel of sausage, a crust, and a couple of baked pears. And as for La Beata there, I fancy she dined on the sausage skin. Let me tell you, that under such circumstances, a regard for the dignity of the profession does not come very forcibly home to one."

"I plead guilty to the good dinner," returned Tito, good-humouredly, "and am far from wishing to deny the fine moral effects you attribute to it. But joking apart, Pippo, I should not say a word, if I were not sure that

you could do better. Look at me now. My work is as regular . . . ”

“Oh yes! no doubt!” cried Pippo; “but everybody cannot have the largest picture-dealer in Florence for one’s brother-in-law. And after all, what is Signor Francesco able to do for you? Can he sell a picture of your own? He can keep you grinding away at copies to sell to English and Americans, who don’t know a Raffael from a Rubens; and that’s all.”

“Regular work, and regular pay, resulting in regular dinners, and the consequent high condition of moral sentiment which you attribute to them. Not very gratifying to artistic ambition certainly, but still honest work, honestly done. And even at that trade one may work dishonestly, as I need not tell you. There are plenty of second-hand copies, sold as copies from the original. But when a copy has got ‘Copied from the original picture by me, Tito Fanetti,’ on its back, all Florence knows that there is no mistake about it.”

“But what the devil would you have me do?” urged Pippo, somewhat petulantly. “Besides, I won’t admit that there is anything dishonest, or approaching to dishonesty, in my work. Old Matteo Zanobi comes hobbling up to my garret here, and asks me to paint him a Flight into Egypt;—‘a Botticelli, you know, my dear; on a circular panel. I will send you the panel, myself; and mind the tone is mellow,’ says the old fellow. And then there comes an old worm-eaten panel; and I set to work and make my picture as much like Botticelli as I can, just as you make your copies as like the originals as you can. What wrong is there in this?”

“The difference in the two cases is in the intention . . . ”

“The intention!” interrupted Pippo; “that’s just what proves the absurdity of your scruples. I paint a picture with the intention of being paid a fair price for my labour. That is my final object. Now we all know that the lawfulness of every act depends, as the Church teaches . . . ”

“Bosh!” interrupted Tito in his turn. “For goodness’

sake do let the Church alone. Who the deuce cares what she teaches? But you can't forget your old trade."

The truth was that Filippo Lonari had been educated by an uncle in an ecclesiastical seminary with a view to the priesthood. But on the death of that relative, before the time had come for him to receive the first orders, he had deserted the cassock for the brush. He possessed very considerable and real artistic capabilities, and his pictures were by no means devoid of merit, though they had failed as yet to procure him employment other than in the very questionable line which he was now attempting to defend, and in which he had been particularly successful. His brother artists declared that he was ruined for life by the misfortune of his ecclesiastical education; and were by no means apt to receive favourably any of the little manifestations of it which cropped out occasionally on the surface of his conversation.

"Never mind the Church! I would rather hear what La Beata thinks of the matter, two to one," continued Tito, feeling probably that such an appeal was the most ignominious manner in which the doctrine of the Church could be refuted; for La Beata was not celebrated in her little world for cultivated powers of intellect.

Perhaps the reader has been expecting to hear before now something of the owner of the sweet voice, which was wont to ask 'Chi è?' when visitors pulled the bell-string at Filippo Lonari's door. To La Beata herself, however, it would have appeared quite preposterous that any notice should have been taken of her, before due attention had been paid to Pippo and his friend of the lordly sex; or, indeed, that any notice should be taken of her at all, until she was forcibly brought on the scene, as it were, by Tito's direct appeal to her. But now that it has become absolutely necessary for the reader to make acquaintance with her, she shall not be presented to him at the fag end of a chapter.

CHAPTER II.

THE WIDOW LETI AND HER DAUGHTER.

SHE had been sitting, while the conversation reported in the last chapter had been carried on between the two artists, on a corner of the low red-cloth-covered platform, at the feet of the grotesque lay figure Dante, as silent and as motionless as he, were it not for the rapid movement of her fingers industriously engaged in knitting a half-completed stocking. This occupation, the mysteries of which appeared just then to necessitate bending down the head and eyes over the work, together with the lowness of her seat, prevented any portion of her face from being visible, except the even circumference of her marvellously long and regular eyelashes, and the ivory white dome of a high and perfectly rounded but not broad forehead. The abundance of her light chestnut-coloured hair was indeed visible enough, and to especial advantage. It was carefully and skilfully arranged (for it was Sunday), in very large and broad braids on either side of the face, and in a huge and most artistically contrived knot at the back of her head; and the position which concealed her features caused a stray ray of sunshine, which was finding its way through an interstice in the mat before the window, to fall directly on the small well-shaped head and delicately-formed back of the neck, and fleck with glistening golden lights the ridges of the undulating braids. The figure was slight and delicately fashioned to a remarkable degree; and though the bust lacked that development which is deemed an essential attribute of adult womanly beauty, it was impossible not to be struck by the extreme elegance of the carriage of the head upon the slender but well-rounded shoulders, and by the exquisite beauty of the line which curved from the tops of them up to the transparent rose-coloured little ear. The exceeding slenderness of the

entire figure, which most connoisseurs would have judged too great for the perfection of female beauty, was not, as La Beata is now presented to the reader, at all concealed or relieved by any of the resources which female art possesses in abundance for such purposes. A dress of cheap and not very fine muslin, but of spotless whiteness, modishly made, and duly stiffened into the approved bell-like amplitude, was indeed at that moment hanging up, and occupying a very large part of the enclosure in one angle of the room, which has been mentioned. But this had been doffed with much precaution immediately on returning from mass that morning, to be resumed with equal care when the hour for the evening *passeggiata*,—the dearly prized stroll with Pippo about the hour of the Ave Maria,—should have arrived. Neither the temperature nor Florentine bienséance in the class to which our new acquaintance belonged, at all required that this garment should be replaced indoors by any other. So La Beata remained *simplex munditiis* in her clean white petticoat, with a black silk handkerchief pinned over her shoulders. It was a disadvantage attending this costume, that it exposed to view an arm which, despite its perfect whiteness, the admirers of beautiful arms would not have approved. Fat women only have beautiful arms, and are surely well entitled to this only compensation for the misfortunes of their fatness. But La Beata's, all too lean and angular as it was, terminated in a wrist of the most exquisite formation, and a long slender hand, such as Vandyke would have loved to paint. It was decidedly an advantage, too, of the undress in question, that its scantiness permitted to protrude from under it, the toe and instep of one of the prettiest imaginable feet,—a foot just somewhat slenderer in proportion to its length than that which a great statue might own,—a foot, which, unlike so many feet which pass for pretty, was unmistakably so when clad in a coarse cotton stocking, and very unornamental loose list slipper.

Her name, as ascertainable from the registers of the baptistery where the miraculous bronze gates of Andrea

Pisano are the first which every infant Florentine passes through after leaving those of his native house, and ascertainable as such by scarcely any other means, was Annunziata Leti. Why in the world, then, was she called La Beata? Wait till she lifts her face, in reply to the appeal made to her by Tito, and you will catch the idea in an instant. Surely if angelic purity was ever expressed by earthly lineaments, it is to be read in that delicately beautiful pale face. It is almost a perfect oval; less beautiful, perhaps, and less suggestive of the possibilities of latent passion, than those so often assigned by Raffael to the Madonna, even in his earlier manner; but such as Beato Angelico has, when happiest in the expression of his ideal, given to the angels of the heavenly choir. The features were not calculated to give a physiognomist the idea of much intellectual power, still less of energy or force of character. Unsympathetic critics might have declared that the face in its general effect was wanting in expression; even that it was chargeable with insipidity. And this verdict might perhaps have been accepted without any violent contradiction by those who had looked on it only while those marvellous long eyelashes were, as was generally the case, veiling the large brown eyes beneath them. We hear of eyes sparkling with intelligence, eyes eloquent with the force of strong volition, or flashing with the fire of latent passion. The eyes in question were none of these. But from their unfathomable limpid depths there welled forth with a mild and withal somewhat sad radiance that infinite capacity of loving, which, let it exist in companionship with whatsoever other gifts or deficiencies it may, is still the divinest thing on earth.

Preachers have abounded in warnings against the sin of permitting an earthly love, as they are wont to term it, to steal aught of the intensity due only, they say, to that which has the invisible for its object. But surely such teaching would reduce the earthly love it does permit, to a something which, when thus robbed of its right to infinity, would not be found exalting to humanity in its nature.

Surely every love which deserves the name partakes of the nature of worship. And its justification for doing so is to be found in the fact, that it is to the God-like, visible to the eye of love in its object, whether it be really existing there or not, that such worship is rendered. Illimitable trustfulness, perfect faith, entire belief are as essentially attributes of such a love, as is unspeakable tenderness. And all these might be read in those large, guileless, gentle eyes, when they spoke forth the innermost secrets of the heart, from which they had their message.

But this divine capacity of loving, rich with the promise of truly infinite blessedness to both the subject and the object of it,—can it be that it is blind, even as the terrestrial Eros? Can it be that its want of intellectual vision may make it the victim of the grossest illusions, and cause it to become a source of misery and destruction? Who does not know, alas! that the answer to such questionings is the oldest of all old stories, the tritest and the saddest of all this world's tragedies; tragedies to be repeated infinitely till time is at an end?—irremediable? Is it the doom of the most God-like natures ever to run the greatest risk of woe and shipwreck? Surely such cannot be the law of a God-made world. How if we conclude that this divinest endowment needs, like every other of man's heritage, the assistance of that other gift, the same which wards the lightning from our roofs, and bids it do our errands? that to taste in safety of the sweetest fruit of the tree of life we must eat of the tree of knowledge also? Shall Love be less divine because his eyes are opened? Shall Love's infinity be rendered finite, his faith be stained with doubt, his worship be abated to a balancing estimation, because he sees with understanding the existence of the same qualities, which before he saw only in the illusions of his own phantasmagoria? Surely not so. Surely in this matter, as in every other sublunary destiny, we may look, though it be with far straining gaze, to the good time coming.

But meanwhile inexorable law, with cruelly beneficent

teaching, rolls on its Juggernaut car, and the old sad story has to be told again and again.

La Beata could love much, but she could understand little. She was, in truth, very ignorant, was La Beata. She knew little indeed beyond what that large simple heart of hers could teach her. Not despicable knowledge this, yet not sufficient for the guidance she needed.

Her little history, up to the time of which our story is speaking, may be very briefly told. Her father had been a keeper, guardian, or whatever such office may be called, at the gallery of the Belle Arte, in Florence. Her mother was an artificial flower maker. Annunziata was their only child, and the small but certain stipend of her father, joined to the earnings of his wife's little industry, sufficed to supply comfortably enough the simple wants of Florentines in that class of life. But Giovanni Leti died when his child was only three years old, and then came a life of struggle and privation for the widow and Annunziata. Still the wolf was kept from the door. By patient industry and careful thrift, Francesca Leti, the mother, still contrived to keep a decent roof over her child and herself. She inhabited two little rooms on the second floor in the street called the *Corso*, not, as might be gathered from the name, one of the principal thoroughfares of the city, but a small busy street in the thickest centre of the town. There she plied her trade, for the purposes of which it was not necessary to keep a shop, seeing that the little manufactory on the second floor was sufficiently well known to her small connection, and the principal part of her business consisted in supplying the shops of the more humble class of milliners. There also little Annunziata "received her education." But it consisted almost entirely in learning the art and mystery of artificial flower making, in which dainty occupation her delicate little fingers learned at a very early age to render her mother material assistance, and had become before she was sixteen very perfectly proficient. She was Nina in those days, as half the girls in Tuscany seem to be familiarly called. It is the pet abbre-

viation for so many names. Does the reader fail to see the mode of derivation by which Annunziata becomes Nina? It is quite simple to Tuscan tongues and ears. Annunziata is by abbreviation Nunziata, by the use of the never-failing affectionate diminutive Nunziatina, and thence, by familiar elision, Nina.

Nobody in those days thought that the widow Leti's pale, fragile-looking girl was a pretty child. But the whole neighbourhood cited her as a shining example of all a loving daughter should be to a widowed and struggling mother. She was, in truth, the one bright sunbeam in the cold pale shade of the widow's declining years. She was devoted to her mother with all the concentrated devotion of that deeply loving nature which had no other object on which to pour forth all the treasures of its abounding tenderness. Early and late the delicate little fingers busied themselves with cheerful activity over the coloured paper, the bits of stiffened calico, and the waxed thread, which formed the material of their industry. Summer and winter the pale young face grew paler, and the slender form, now rapidly shooting up into womanhood, more slight over the light but incessant labour, which made the life of both mother and daughter little better than one long imprisonment; but neither of them dreamed that they had anything to regret or to pine for in that dull obscure life of theirs. The daily necessities were supplied on a scale so wonderfully small and simple, it is true, that that which appeared decent competence to the Florentine widow and her daughter, would have seemed to the poorest of our better nourished population a state of mere prolonged starvation. But the few small coins needed for the daily expenditure were forthcoming; and if, when autumn arrived, the hoarded fund for payment of the rent was ready, the mother and daughter asked no more of fate.

Nor had the poor widow failed to do her duty by her child to the best of her power and lights. She had received a good religious education, had La Nina. Due care had been taken, when she had reached her seventh year, to

have her properly anointed with holy oil on the forehead on occasion of making her first solemn confession to Mother Church of the sins human nature is apt to fall into at that period of life. The sacred unction had been duly bound on to her little forehead for the space of three days with a white fillet marked with a blood-red cross. No pains had been spared to send her to her first communion five years later, with a spotless new white frock, a pair of white satin slippers, and a wreath of white rose-blossoms on her brow. Never did the widow and her pale tall girl fail to attend early mass at a neighbouring church on every Sunday and holiday, whether it were "a day of entire obligation," or not,—not the dissipation of a mid-day mass, when smart toilettes are exhibited, and the world is there to see them, but a drowsy, utterly unamusing early morning mass at an obscure church, where there was neither necessity for, nor temptation to, the smallest exhibition of crinoline. Never in the widow's tiny household was the necessary farthing wanting for the supply of the glimmering spark of lamp before the black little picture of the Madonna, of which it was impossible to distinguish anything save the shimmer of the tarnished gilt crown on the Virgin's head, even though that farthing had to be squeezed out of the price of the daily pittance of bread. Never had Nina, from the day of that first confession of her shortcomings, been so thoughtless as to pass this venerated talisman, which hung in the dark little passage opposite the door of entrance, without crossing herself and bending her gracious head. And above her own narrow and scantily furnished pallet, surmounting a small cross, and a couple of withered sprigs of olive bough, which in Tuscany does duty for the palm-branch, hung a French lithographed portrait of the Virgin of seven sorrows, with seven poniards plunged symmetrically in her bosom. And Nina used to think, as she proffered to this portraiture of her patroness her nightly petition for the successful completion and prosperous sale of the forget-me-nots and lilies-of-the-valley, which had been the object of her day's labour, that

she could never refuse aught to the appeal of eyes which looked on her with a glance so full of infinite love and ineffable sadness as that portrayed in the much-loved print.

And now the reader is as completely acquainted with the entire mind, heart, and soul of Nunziatina Leti as if he had made her daily life his study from her cradle upwards. Nay, had he possessed a spell by which to scan each innermost thought and movement of the heart, he would have discovered nothing beyond the combinations of ideas and emotions deducible from these simple elements. There was absolutely nothing else in that young heart and brain. Yes! it must decidedly be admitted that La Beata was lamentably, wonderfully ignorant.

It was not till she was about sixteen that the neighbours and few acquaintances of the widow Leti began to find their observation attracted by the appearance of her daughter. It was not even then that any of these observers had the smallest idea that she was beautiful. Form and feature of quite a different mould would have seemed to them absolutely necessary to any such pretension. Yet there was a something, which, had they ever given a thought to the matter would have remained inexplicable to them, that did attract their eyes, and did excite emotion of some sort in their breasts, when they allowed them to rest on the girl. What the deuce could it be? She was not like other girls! She was certainly in some way out of the common. Old Beppo Vanni, the artists' colourman, who kept a large shop in the Corso, just opposite the widow's dwelling, seemed to have brought the greatest amount of intelligent meditation to the subject, when he declared that Nina Leti always somehow put him in mind of that Saint Cecilia the foreigners were for ever having copied.

Just about that time the widow Leti's eyesight began to fail her so much, that she was becoming very rapidly incapable of working at her occupation. In vain she sat in the full light of her little window and strained the old eyeballs till they ached in the endeavour to distinguish the delicate

shades of colour which her manufacture required. The produce of the painful but futile effort was valueless and unsaleable. In vain, too, did poor Nunziatina strive by increased toil to supply the deficiency in their means which resulted from her mother's incapacity. She had done her utmost before, and could not therefore now succeed in doing more. At last the wolf was at the door in earnest; and the old woman and the young girl looked into the hopeless future with hopeless terror.

It was then that that notion of Nina's likeness to the Saint Cecilia fructified in kindly old Beppo Vanni's mind, as he sat one evening at his own door, "taking the freshness," as the Tuscans say, and meditating what could be done for that poor widow Leti and her daughter. If the girl was so like many of the faces he had often seen in pictures, was it not possible that she might be the very model a painter might wish? He knew pretty well all the artists more or less; and at all events it would cost nothing to try. He would go over the way and broach the subject to the women at once.

So he did. And mother and daughter listened to his proposal both with blank amazement, the mother with little of hope, and the daughter with much of shrinking terror. But old Vanni talked on, rising gradually into a most absolute authority on all subjects connected with art and artists, as he became aware of the utter ignorance of his hearers. He assured the widow that many most respectable young women of his acquaintance earned a comfortable subsistence by such means. And he pointed out with most satisfactory clearness to Nina herself, that it was only beauties who were wanted to sit for goddesses and nymphs and all that class of characters, who went, saving their presence, almost naked; that her line of business would evidently be of a very different sort,—merely saints and such-like, who always were draped from the chin to the toes. So at length the rhetoric of the worthy colourman, assisted by the yet more persuasive eloquence of dire necessity, so far prevailed, that he was com-

missioned to mention the matter to some of the artists who frequented his shop.

The upshot of the negotiation was that Nina was engaged by our friend Tito to sit, or rather kneel, for a picture of a Roman girl praying at a road-shrine of the Madonna for the recovery of her sick lover. That was her first engagement in her new profession. The simple idea was within her comprehension; and the feeling to be expressed, one, with which she could entirely sympathise. She looked the part to perfection accordingly. The picture made a success, and so did the model. From that time she had no difficulty in finding quite as much occupation in her new business as her strength would enable her to undertake; and that, as old Beppo Vanni had prophesied, without being called on to represent any of that class of personages, which "the beauties," as the old man said, are required to sit for.

Nina was at that time all but sixteen years old; and it was two years previous to the time when we have found her, too evidently at home, in Pippo Lonari's studio.

She very soon became well known and an universal favourite in the artist world, which her new vocation obliged her to frequent. It was a world, as will be readily understood, far more able to appreciate her peculiar beauty, than that which had alone seen her previously. And just about that period her pure, unearthly, saintly beauty grew and increased, and became day by day more wonderful. The too slender figure gained but little in development. But a deeper expression came into those strange sad eyes; and the slightest possible tint of rose-colour was added to the pale cheek. There could be little doubt that the new model was beautiful, though she was still as little adapted as ever to sit for that class of female subjects, for which, according to the dictum of old Beppo Vanni, "the beauties" were required. For a different class of subjects she was soon pronounced by the Florentine artist world to be invaluable. It was then that she received from these new patrons the *sobriquet* of La Beata. It was one of those nicknames, which, from their evident and striking fitness,

at once thrust into oblivion the names whose place they take, and adhere thenceforward indelibly to the persons so happily designated by them. La Beata was very soon wholly unknown by any other appellation.

And what about the result of all this unprotected companionship, and familiar acquaintance with the artist world of Florence on the moral character and conduct of La Beata? How did the innocent and pure-hearted but wholly inexperienced and very ignorant girl steer her course among the manifold dangers of such a manner of life? It may appear at first sight perhaps unintelligible and incredible, but it is nevertheless a certain truth, that the dangers which lay around La Beata's path were very much less than they would have been had she been similarly circumstanced in some other cities where a far higher standard of morality is professed, and a stricter rule of conduct enforced; less, it must be understood, as long as the maiden was fancy-free; not so, perhaps, when such should cease to be the case. Many an offer of heart and hand, unconnected with any allusion to legal or ecclesiastical ratification, may no doubt have reached her ear. But they called no blush of shame to the cheek, awakened no pang of moral indignation in the breast, and were rejected by the heart-whole maiden as simply as the most strictly proper matrimonial proposals might be by ladies living under a different dispensation. And such rejections would have been submitted to, with neither more nor less of rebellion against them, than is wont to be exhibited by aspirant husbands. Snares, cunningly contrived pitfalls, arts of seduction, there would have been none. Nor—most important consideration of all—would any consciousness of being surrounded by an atmosphere of vice have sullied the ignorant purity of her soul. A loveless union, brought about by any kind of consideration or temptation whatever, would have seemed to her imagination simply impossible, and altogether out of the question; while the absence of such union when mutual affection existed would have appeared equally unintelligible. So sadly ignorant

was La Beata! The non-performance of the marriage rite would have seemed to her mind to entail a social position about as much inferior to that of people married with a low mass, as the latter was inferior to the condition of such as were made man and wife with all the ceremonial of a full choir. But the dangers, the imprudence of such a tie, not only unsanctioned by divine, but unprotected by human law! Even supposing her poor mind to have been in such a state of heathen darkness as to have been incapable of appreciating the higher considerations of Christian morality, could she have been ignorant, that a tie lawlessly formed to-day might be lawlessly broken to-morrow? Were there no warning instances of broken vows, if not of broken hearts, of deserted mothers and nameless children even in the small social environment which made her little world?

In truth such beacons were not wanting. But to the moral feeling as well as in the phraseology of that little world, such sad cases were "*disgrazie*," and not "*disgraces*." "*Disgrazia*," a misfortune, a regrettable circumstance arising from the absence of "*grazia*," or *favour*, and in no wise implying either want of "*grace*" in our theological sense of the term, or "*disgrace*" in the acceptation given to the word by the robuster moral sense of a Protestant population, is received by nations taught to expect their well-being from the special protection of favouring saints, as a full and sufficient account and explanation of very much evil of all sorts which people, whose teaching has been that conduct makes fate, speak of by a different name. And then La Beata was *not* prudent; had no tincture of that highly-valued virtue among the simple elements of her singularly incomposite nature. When she might give her heart it was but too certain that it would be given without any prudential considerations respecting future contingencies, which would appear to her as wholly beyond the range of possibility as the wildest reversal of the order of nature. Calculate the chances that love might by lapse of time grow cold! Quite as soon would she have thought of counting how many more years the mighty dome might

last, beneath whose shadow she had been born and lived. Both appeared to her equally and necessarily eternal. But those other luckless cases, those *unfavoured* loves, on which the saints had not smiled? Might not that which had happened to others befall her also? Alas! when did youth ever so reason?

So La Beata walked the path of her new life in simple unsuspectingness of evil uncontaminated at least by any consciousness of the proximity of sin or shame, and safe, like Una with her lion, as long as she trod it heartwhole and fancy free.

And this safety lasted for more than a year from the time she had first entered on her new profession. It had been found impossible by more than one among the best of those with whom she had been thrown into intimacy, to effect a lodgment in a heart already fully occupied by one great love. During all that time La Beata had lived but for her mother. The widow had become entirely dependent upon her exertions and care; and this changed relationship added a new element to the tender love, which had all the strength of a solitary and life-long passion. Her mother too was evidently declining in strength and health, and before long a painful anxiety was added to the daughter's preoccupation. Under these circumstances her heart had been closed against the approach of strangers, and all her thought throughout the livelong day was centered on the evening hour, when she should return to the little lonely home in the Corso, learn how her mother had got through her solitary day, enjoy the one pleasure of her life in striving to cheer her, and expending her earnings in little purchases for the increase of the invalid's comfort.

And this lasted, as has been said, for more than a year. Then came a change. Old Francesca Leti reached the termination of her pilgrimage, and went to her rest in the common grave opened for that day's "undistinguished" dead in the bleak dreary cemetery of Trespiano, some three miles up the Apennine on the Bologna road. There is no following of the dead by mourning relatives in that last

journey of the Florentine citizen. Death's harvest is each day gathered in an "asylum for the dead," as the dismal place is called—somewhat strangely to our ears;—and at midnight each day in the year, the day's tribute is despatched on its solitary journey, unaccompanied save by the driver of that truly "omnibus" van. Some two hours later it is received at its destination by the solitary capuchin friar appointed to this dreary duty; the few prescribed prayers are said, or not said, according to the delicacy of his conscience; and the new citizens in that dead Florence are by next day's dawn even less "distinguished," or distinguishable, than they were among the crowd of the living.

And La Beata was alone in the little dwelling, where all her life had passed, during the long hours of that night.

Then came her kind old neighbour, Beppo Vanni the colourman, with such words of comfort, and proffers of service, as he was able to afford. And it was settled between them that La Beata should find a home in his house, at all events for the present; an arrangement proposed by the worthy colourman in a truly friendly spirit, yet possibly not altogether without a lurking thought that it might be useful to him in his artist connection; for La Beata was already becoming known in the art community as an invaluable model in her own especial line.

So the past year's life was resumed; and La Beata soon found her time so fully occupied, that she had to keep count of the applications for her services, in order that each patron might be duly attended to, as it came to his turn. Beppo Vanni was delighted at so decided a success.

But he could not make his protégée as delighted with it as he felt she ought to be. In truth all seemed changed and void to her; the whole interest and meaning of her life had passed out of it. The one hour of her daily existence, which gave value to the rest, was gone. That return *home* to the little room and its expecting inhabitant each day at "the twenty-four," as the old world Florentine still terms the hour of sunset, though he has long

since left off using that obsolete mode of reckoning the hours in any other case;—that return, the expectation of which had been the entire interest of the day, came now only to bring with it painfully contrasting memories of the days gone for ever. Life was void and purposeless to La Beata, because love had died out of it. That great craving heart was empty; and the days when she could tread the path of her life in safety were consequently gone. Some being to love! some creature, something, if better were not, to fill the aching void, to be the recipient of all that abounding wealth of tenderness, which must by fiat of Him who gave it be expended, under penalty of its turning to life-destroying poison if shut up in forced sterility! some food for the yearning sickening hunger for sympathy!

That was the cry, imperious, refusing to be silenced, of the heaven-ordained needs of the heart; inarticulate, as are the behests of Nature, addressing themselves, not intelligibly to the understanding, but prompting by uncomprehended solicitings, and enforcing obedience by remorseless infliction of suffering.

So the hour of “danger” in the path had come. And La Beata went forth to meet it on her way, unsuspecting, unwarned, with no moral compass-card to guide her, in all the innocence of her boundless ignorance, and no spell against all shapes of evil save the unsullied purity and guileless simplicity of her maiden heart.

CHAPTER III.

DANGER !

OCCASIONS which seem quite special in their precise aptitude to bring about the events afterwards attributed to them, are never wanting, when causes of more wide and general operation have rendered such events inevitable,

"There is a fate in these things," as the professors of a short and easy system of philosophy express it with perfect satisfaction to themselves.

It so happened, accordingly, that one of the first engagements La Beata was called on to fulfil after her return to her work, was to sit to our friend Pippo Lonari for an Annunciation. The picture had been ordered by a well-known dealer, well known to a certain class of artists, and a certain class of purchasers, whom it was the great object of his life to keep from ever becoming acquainted with each other; and the picture is doubtless at this moment the treasured possession of some English or American lover of high art, on whose walls it figures as a fine and undoubted specimen of this or the other "quattrocentista" master, whose life and style have been carefully got up from Vasari by the fortunate purchaser, since he had "the luck to pick it up." The picture would not be a disgrace to any purchaser's wall, did it appear there as the work of an obscure artist, one Filippo Lonari. But that name, at all events, it is very certain was not the one applied to it.

La Beata sat for both the figures, the angel announcing the wondrous tidings, and the submissive "handmaid of the Lord" who receives them. And admirably had she conceived and presented the spiritual meaning and fit expression of either figure. The picture was a success; not, it will of course be understood for the artist who had painted it, and still less for the unknown model who had contributed so much to its merit, but to the dealer who sold it;—a success, which was so far reflected on the former, as that it made the dealer willing to tempt the painter's honesty by fresh commissions of the same discreditable sort.

The twofold sitting for this picture had of course been a long affair, occasioning much continued intercourse between the painter and his invaluable model. The quickness and genuinely poetical feeling with which she had entered into and succeeded in expressing the sentiment required in the picture, had had the effect of promoting the mere model

almost to the position of an adviser. Plans of new pictures had been discussed between them; and the artist had been led to appreciate at their true value the latent æsthetic capabilities of his model, and the important services which she might render him. And there was a charm for La Beata in this intercourse, which it is not difficult to understand. For the first time in her life, appeal had been made to the higher capacities of her nature. They had been called into activity by the only means which the utterly uncultivated state of her intelligence left possible, by an appeal to the poetry of the heart. The apparently arid rock had been smitten, and the waters of a true poetic temperament had gushed forth in abundance. The mere fact, too, of the creation of a new interest in the void of her life, of a something for thought to rest on outside the weary round within which it had since the death of her mother been confined, was a source of unrecognised but very pleasurable relief to the intolerable emptiness of the weary days.

Easy to understand that all this must have been pleasant! Equally evident, alas! that prudence would have classified such pleasures as "doubly hazardous!" If only the Pygmalion to whose lot it fell to animate the lovely statue had been somewhat worthier of the fortune, than poor Pippo Lonari!

Then, just as the intercourse which had arisen in the manner described was growing into intimacy, another incident occurred with the "fatality" usual in such cases, of a nature to render the escape of the limed bird well-nigh impossible. Pippo had been living ever since he commenced his career as an artist with an only sister. Her constant presence in the studio had no doubt facilitated the terms of easy familiar intercourse on which La Beata had fallen into the habit of visiting it. Almost immediately after the completion of the picture of the Annunciation, Assunta Lonari was taken ill. What was to be done in the narrow little lodging consisting of just two rooms then occupied by the artist and his sister? Nothing can

be conceived more helpless than a man in such a position. If the male member of a household so constituted falls ill, his companion, be she sister, or wife, or mother, tends him as a matter of course. But neither brother, husband, nor son can transform himself into the "ministering angel," required by the needs of a sick chamber. If sickness like other ills came into the world by woman's fault, that at least, as well indeed as most of the others, is rendered tolerable only by her tending and sympathy.

Of course the nursing of Assunta Lonari fell to the lot of La Beata. She never made formal offer of her services to Pippo on the occasion; nor did he either ask for, or specially accept them. It seemed to all parties a matter of course. She was "neighbour" to the sick woman; and in devoting to her nights and days of watching and attendance, did under the circumstances no more after all than almost any one of her station, country, and sex would have done.

But here was another element of "danger" in the path. Here was a community of alternating hopes and fears, and petty cares. Here was daily, nightly, almost hourly isolated companionship during the short but constantly recurring minutes of anxious consultation, of necessary refreshment, of mutual consolation and encouragement. But greater danger was yet behind. The end came at last. Assunta Lonari died. And she, too, was within twelve hours on her silent though not solitary journey to Trespiano.

Then it seemed to the man and woman left face to face within the narrow walls of that small dwelling, as if a vast solitude had suddenly been made around them. Suddenly, that which had stood between them as it were a veil, mitigating the sense of absolute face to face presence and spiritual contact, was removed by the removal of the dead. Even as the smallest parapet on the edge of a precipice makes all the difference to the imagination of one who walks its brink, so to the two left together in that room the withdrawal of that third, though but a dying woman

scarcely conscious of their presence, nay, though but the dead form from which the spirit had fled, made a difference in their position which each felt to be wonderful, inexplicable. It seemed as if the magnetic currents of sympathy, the hidden influences of soul on soul, the mysterious speaking of eye to eye, had hitherto passed through an interrupting medium, which had modified, mitigated, and deadened the violence of their meeting; whereas now they met full and direct, with a result like that of an electric shock, startling to both of them, and shaking the weaker to the very centre of her being. They stood before each other in the great void around them, even as the first pair stood in the solitude of the new-made world; and as in Eden, so in that mean chamber, the relationship in which alone it appeared possible that they must thenceforth stand towards each other revealed itself to them.

Then words had to be spoken, tears to be shed and dried, consolations to be given, out-looks towards the future, to which youth so instinctively turns from past sorrow, to be shared; then hands to be clasped, and vows to be exchanged—and a “fatality” to be accomplished.

The Church, too, did her part, not, alas! at the altar, but in the confessional. The old *curato*, to whose little heeding ear the simple diary of La Beata's life had been duly from time to time communicated for many a year, on receiving the graver continuation of his penitent's life-narrative, seriously urged on her the duty of persuading her lover to regularise their union, pointing out that the Church's dues were not so heavy as to be prohibitory. He also enjoined recitations of penitential psalms and rosaries. But on rising from the seat of his spiritual office he smoothed, as of yore, with his venerable hand the braids of her hair as he bade God bless her. And the psalms were duly repeated, and the rosaries punctually said, all paid with the scrupulous honesty of a conscientious debtor; and as to the advisability of investing money in purchasing in more formal shape, that blessing, which her old confessor had already given her, in the manner which he had advised,

why that was a matter which Pippo understood best. Whatever he did was surely right—Pippo knew.

And the gossips of the neighbourhood said to each other, "*La Nina ha preso Pippo Lonari il pittore per damo, sai.*"

"*Speriamo che la menera a buon fine, poveretta!*"

"Nina, you know, has taken up with Pippo the painter for her sweetheart."

"Poor little thing, let's hope it will turn out well."

And that was all.

Charitable English reader, to whom much has assuredly been given, remember that it is from such that much will be expected; and weigh not with your well-regulated balance the errors of a sister, whose innocence and guilt, and knowledge of either of them were about upon a par with those of Yarico the poor Indian girl in the ballad.

CHAPTER IV.

TITO'S IDEA.

"NEVER mind what the Church says! I would far rather hear what La Beata thinks about the matter," said Tito Fanetti. The matter, it will be remembered, was that question of the degree in which an artist is guilty of dishonesty, who accepts commissions to paint imitations of ancient pictures, to be sold to deceived purchasers as the productions of other hands. This was the industry by which Pippo Lonari had supported himself and La Beata since the day described at the end of the last chapter, a department of art requiring talent of really no inconsiderable kind, but miserably paid, as is always all work which dare not avow and show itself in the broad light of day. It must be added that, in a very secondary degree, the accusation of aiding and abetting a dishonest traffic might also be brought against La Beata; for her share in the

production of these mock ancient pictures had been no unimportant one. The expression, sentiments, and feeling of those devout pre-Raffaellite painters of the "ages of faith" would hardly have been imitated so successfully by our friend Pippo without the aid of such a model. Hardly would it have been possible to find a second so admirably adapted for the purpose by speciality of form and feature, no less than by the genuine child-like purity and simplicity of heart, which informed those features with an expression unassumable by art, and by the quick sensibilities of a truly poetic idiosyncrasy, which enabled her to seize and assimilate the idea intended to be represented. Clearly, La Beata was an accomplice in the production of forged Crivellis, Beato Angelicos, and Botticellis. What had she to say on the subject in answer to Tito Fanetti's uncompromising morality?

"Certainly, 'gnor* Tito," she said, raising her large brown eyes from her knitting, and throwing back the long silken fringe above them till it touched the delicate brow above; "certainly Pippo knows better than I; and what you say about not minding what the Church says cannot be right in any way. It is true," she added, after a pause, "that I should not like any one to ask Pippo if he had painted such a picture, and that he should be obliged to say No when it was really his work. But Pippo knows best," she added, ever swinging round her sheet-anchor of confidence and faith.

"Brava, La Beata!" cried Tito, "that is just it. Can it be well, Pippo, to put yourself in a position which may compel you to a falsehood, and that falsehood the denial of your own work?"

"Oh, yes! brava La Beata! bravo Tito! bravi one and all," grumbled Pippo, a little irritated. "It is all very fine, but one must live—not to mention *two*," he added, unconsciously allowing in his crossness just a little tip of the cloven hoof to become visible; "and I am sure I don't

* Florentine cockney for Signor Tito.

see how that is to be managed except by accepting old Mattei's work."

"Would your excellency condescend," said Tito, with a slight intonation of satire in his voice, "to make an honest copy, call it a copy, and sell it as a copy, I should like to know?"

"What's the good of talking in that way," rejoined Pippo, testily, "when you know I could not sell the copy when made?—at this time of year, too, when there is not a blessed stranger in all Florence. Of course I'd copy, and be thankful, too, if I could get a chance."

"Well," said Tito, "the fact is I have an idea."

"You don't mean it," interrupted the other; "poor Tito! What will become of the good dinners and the regular work? What business has a copyist with an idea? It will be the ruin of you; strangle it at once, my Tito, before it begets a brood of others. They increase and multiply, the pernicious things! You don't know what it is to have one idea; you don't know the danger of it. Once consent to nourish it, and foster it, and it will soon turn you from a comfortable, regular working copyist, eating excellent dinners, and lecturing on the dignity of the profession, into—into as poor a devil as myself," he concluded, throwing up his handsome head, and passing his fingers through his long black hair, with an air and attitude meant to express the sublime martyrdom of a genius too exalted to earn the wages of a plodder by plodding work. The tirade, however, was only one part coxcombical to three parts satirical. It was an opportunity for a little bit of revenge on Tito for his lecturing, and for working off the ill humour which it had generated. It was, nevertheless, true that Pippo *was* the cleverer man of the two, and *had* more of original talent and spontaneity than his steady-going and well-to-do friend. But Tito had not only abundant good sense, and sufficient self-knowledge to be quite aware that this was the case, but also an inexhaustible stock of that good humour which arises from being well contented with oneself and with the world around one.

"True! my poor Pippo!" he rejoined, in the same tone; "true every word of it, my hapless Michael Angelo under a wet blanket! Heaven forbid that I should change my journeyman's work, fat capons and Chianti, for ideas, dry crusts, and cold sausage! I was about to rid myself of my idea by offering it to you. One more or less will make no difference to you, who are eaten out of house and home by legions of them. My idea is simply this. I know of a commission for a certain copy, for which a handsome price would be paid; and I think I see how you may get the job."

"But why do you not take it yourself?" said Pippo, feeling a little ashamed of his ill humour, as Tito's friendly intentions became evident.

"Because I can't execute it," said Tito, quietly.

"And you think I can?" said Pippo, perfectly restored to his complacency by the apparent compliment.

"Yes!" continued Tito, "I think perhaps you can; if La Beata will lend her help."

Again the large inquiring brown eyes looked up, while the long delicate fingers continued their work as rapidly and uninterruptedly as before.

"What the deuce," cried Pippo, "can La Beata have to do with it, if it is to be a copy?"

"Why the case is this," answered Tito. "An English *milordo* left a commission last winter with my brother-in-law for a copy of the Madonna del Cardellino. But it must be a copy from the original."

"And how does the Englishman mean to get it?" rejoined Pippo. "Does he know that every turn for a copy of the Cardellino is bespoken for years to come; and that the man who is now copying it, whoever he may be, must have put his name down on the list something like ten years ago? Ridiculous, isn't it, that these foreigners will have endless copies of a certain half-dozen or so of pictures? so that while the rest of the gallery is nearly empty, it is impossible to get place for an easel before one of the favourites without waiting years for your turn."

If I ever have a son I shall put his name down for all the crack pictures the same day he is baptised."

"If the Englishman does not know all that, my brother-in-law knows it well enough. And he knows that an original copy of the Cardellino must be paid for," said Tito.

"But how on earth am I, of all men in Florence, to make such a copy?" returned the other; "and, above all, what in the world has La Beata there to do with it? Do explain your riddle at once!"

"I should have explained it by this time, if you would have a minute's patience, and hear me out," said Tito. "This is my plan. The next now on the list at the gallery for copying the Cardellino is old Francesco Borsoli. Now if you could induce him to give up his turn to you?"

"Bah! a very promising scheme truly! to me too! Why he would as soon think of—"

"But you won't hear! do listen. You remember when there was to be a new vice-president at the Academy last year how furious old Borsoli was because he was passed over. He made sure he was to have the appointment. Well, he has been furious ever since; and he means to take a revenge which is to crush all his enemies to powder. He is going to paint a picture, which shall at the same time be a proof of the injustice done him and its punishment. It is to represent Astræa leaving this earth, and especially the city of Florence, for ever. Sundry portraits are to be introduced, damned to an immortality of pillory, in the lower part of the canvas. But the Goddess of Justice was to have been La Beata. Now you see it?"

It must be explained, that La Beata, from the day on which she had given herself to Pippo, had declined all engagements to sit as a model to any other artist. Some undefined sentiment, some newly-awakened timidity had from that time forth made the occupation, which had previously been indifferent, insuperably distasteful to her. The only one point on which she had uttered any word to Pippo respecting the arrangement and conditions of the life they were thenceforth to lead in common, was a

gentle suggestion that she should for the future sit only to him. And to this he had readily agreed, partly because the time had not yet come when he would have opposed any wish of hers, and partly because it seemed to him no small advantage to be the monopolist of so valuable a model. So there was a three days' outcry of vexation and disappointment among the Florentine artistic community. This, that, and another picture, for which the sitting of La Beata had been counted on, were, their designers declared, henceforward not capable of execution.

Loudest and most despairing among these complainants was the disappointed candidate for the vice-presidency of the Academy. What was to become of that picture on which he had set his heart? What was to become of his anticipated vengeance? Where was he to look for an Astræa who should in any way embody his conception? Was injustice always to triumph and come off scot-free? He was half inclined to believe that La Beata's retirement from the profession of a model had been schemed by his enemies for the sole purpose of frustrating the righteous retribution with which he was preparing to overwhelm them.

Now you see it! as Tito said. Now it became apparent to Pippo and La Beata, as well as to the reader, how her assistance was necessary to Tito's plan. The irate old painter was to be induced to cede to Pippo Lonari his turn of the privilege of copying the celebrated Madonna del Cardellino in the Tribune at the gallery of the Uffizi, on condition that La Beata should sit for Astræa in the act of abandoning the world for good and all, in his picture.

"And now what do you think of my idea?" cried Tito. "You see, when regular-going comfortably-fed fellows like me *do* have ideas, they are apt to be of a practical and less dangerous sort than those you were warning me against. I will guarantee that my brother-in-law will be glad enough to give you the commission, if you can contrive to get the means of making the copy. And really I don't see any other chance of his getting an original copy for his purchaser. What do you say to it?"

"I say the idea is a good one, and say, also, that you are a good fellow. I'll make the copy, and make a good one, your brother-in-law may depend on it."

"But what says La Beata?" pursued Tito. "Does she consent to her part in the plot?"

La Beata looked up with a bright, pleased smile on her pale face.

"Of course she does!" said Pippo. "Poor Tina will be only too glad to help me to get such a chance."

And "Pippo knows," said poor Tina, using her favourite phrase to express the correctness of his statement, that of course she would do anything he could ask of her.

Tina, it must be understood, was short for Beatina, which was diminutive of Beata. It is impossible that an Italian girl's name should not by some process be brought to some such pleasant sounding and easily spoken pet appellation. A similar process to that which had made Annunziata into Nina now made Beata, itself a nickname, but too formal and stately a one for the every-day use of domestic intercourse, into Tina. It was already "of course" with Pippo, that "poor Tina" should make no opposition to his slightest behest.

"So now it only remains," said Tito, "to open the negotiations with Borsoli. And that I will undertake. I shall in all probability see him to-night at the café. What are you others going to do this evening?"

"Oh!" said Pippo, "we thought of going to the Goldoni to see a new farce they have brought out there. They say one gets a lira's worth of laughing for one's half-paul."

The poor couple, it will be observed, who had dined on a crust and a sausage, could nevertheless find the means of indulging in the theatre, at least on Sunday evening. But this was only after the ordinary usage of Florentine life; according to which, it has been said, the requirements of humanity, ranged in order of their necessity, would stand thus: 1st, a somewhat more than decent dress for festal days; 2nd, the theatre; and 3rd, daily bread. The half-

paul, for which the second of these necessities can be enjoyed, represents, it is true, only about twopence-half-penny of our money. But that even this sum should be expended on it by many who are absolutely short of daily food, as is the case, certainly indicates in a very remarkable degree a preference for intellectual over purely sensual satisfaction, not to be met with among a similar class of any other population.

"Well! I'll tell you how it shall be then," said Tito. "After you have brought La Beata home from the theatre, you come on and meet me at the café Michael-Angiolo, in the Via Larga. In all probability I shall have seen Borsoli, and will tell you the result."

So it was settled. And Tito, after having very carefully arranged his hair, beard, and moustache, and settled the set of his hat to his satisfaction before a fragment of mirror on Pippo's wall, went to exhibit himself in the "Lungarno," where all the *bourgeois* world were by this time taking their evening stroll, and enjoying that cool evening hour, the infinite delight of which can only be appreciated by the dwellers in a southern clime.

It was near midnight before the two artists met at the rendezvous indicated by Tito in the Via Larga.

Florence is not the gay rake that Venice is—or was, rather, before the life was utterly crushed out of her by her trembling tyrants. Popular manners and modes of life have a wonderfully obstinate vitality in them, not observable about the apex of the social pyramid. And the thrifty old Republic on the banks of the Arno has never learned to imitate the dissipated Queen of the Adriatic, in her inveterate habit of not going home till morning. When the cool night-breeze is rippling the lagoon, and the moon is flooding the piazza of St. Mark with silver light, the small hours are in pleasure-loving Venice the most full of life of any in the twenty-four. But when the bell in Giotto's matchless tower has boomed out midnight over the silent city, sober Florence has gone to bed; or has at least gone home,—“although the girls are pretty, and

although the moon shines bright," as the rakish old song has it.

The Via Larga accordingly was silent and well-nigh deserted when Pippo, having left La Beata at home in the Via dell' Amore, went to his appointment at the café Michael-Angiolo, the favourite resort of the Florentine artist community. The little tables in front of the café standing on the pavement of the public way, and entirely monopolising the footpath—not in defiance of, but in happy ignorance of street police-law—were almost all deserted; and yawning waiters were preparing to shut up for the night. Tito, however, true to his tryst, was still sitting on the moonlight street in front of the café, patiently smoking his cigar, and studying the lines of perspective, sharply marked by the black shadows thrown by St. Mark's Church on the white pavement.

"Well," said Pippo, coming up, "what success for the idea?"

"All right!"

"The old fellow accepts then, and gives up his turn in the Tribune, for which he has been waiting for heaven knows how many years?"

"It goes upon wheels, I tell you," returned Tito, using the Tuscan metaphor, equivalent to our more maritime expression, going swimmingly. "The old boy jumped at it. He is as furious as ever. He don't care a straw about the Cardellino, or any other picture on earth, save THE picture, which is to heap confusion on the heads of his enemies."

"It will be a very large composition, by all accounts, if all those he considers such are to be pilloried in it."

"Poor old Borsoli! I shouldn't wonder if he were to paint a better picture than he has ever painted yet."

"Nor I. Indignation may paint pictures as well as make verses perhaps," said school-bred Pippo.

"If it can," said Tito, on whom his friend's bit of classicality was utterly thrown away, "he will do it **this** time. He is boiling over."

"When does he want to begin?" asked Pippo.

"Instantly! La Beata will have enough to do to satisfy him. I should have stayed with him all night if I had waited to hear all that is to be expressed in the face of Astræa. The mouth is to be eloquent with a whole chapter of invective against charlatans, pretenders, time-servers, and Academy-directors of all sorts. One eye is to look up to heaven with despairing sorrow, and the other to flash withering indignation earthwards. The nose, of course, is to be turned up with ineffable contempt; the toe, as she rises from earth, to overturn the Academy with a parting kick!"

"Poor Tina! And when can I begin at the Cardellino?"

"On Monday. Carlo Fermi is at work there now: his time is up on Saturday. To-morrow we will go to my brother-in-law and settle the matter. I know you will find the terms good."

"I shall be content, I have no doubt. But how can I ever thank you, my dear fellow?" said Pippo, feeling really very grateful to Tito for his genuine kindness.

"Only by kicking that old rascal Mattei down-stairs, when he next comes to bespeak a Giotto or a Gaddo Gaddi. Good night!"

"Good night! I am to call for you at your place to-morrow morning. What hour?"

"Say ten. Good night, *mio caro!*"

CHAPTER V.

MAESTRO BORSOLI'S STUDIO.

IN due course of time both pictures were painted; the copy of the favourite Madonna del Cardellino by Pippo Lonari, and the great expression of retributive justice by old Maestro Borsoli. The first was completed to the entire

satisfaction of Signor Tanari the dealer, Tito's brother-in-law, in due time to be well dry by the arrival of his English customer, who was expected in the autumn. It was admitted on all hands to be an admirably successful copy.

It may be that Pippo's practice in drawing from the pure outlines and eminently spiritual beauty of La Beata's features had been a good preparation for the task of reproducing the master-piece of Raffael. At all events his success in doing so was complete. And as the expected customer was rather an important person in the Florence art-market, and well known to be a very competent judge of painting, as well as a liberal purchaser, Signor Tanari was exceedingly well pleased to have been able to execute so satisfactorily a commission, which he had feared he would not be able to execute at all. In short our friend Pippo had made a hit.

Signor Borsoli's picture was also completed entirely to his own satisfaction, if not to the utter defeat and destruction of his enemies. Every morning while the two works were in contemporaneous progress, Pippo, as he went to the gallery, accompanied La Beata to the door of the old painter's studio. And many a laugh they had together over his exigencies, and instructions to his model. Nevertheless she contrived to acquit herself on the whole to the old man's satisfaction.

Towards the end of the work they had become very good friends; and La Beata had discovered that irritable vanity and much absurdity were not incompatible with a large amount of kindness, and even of sound good sense on matters unconnected with art and its disappointed ambitions and jealousies. Every day about one o'clock he used to have a little cup of black coffee, and a small roll brought him from a neighbouring café; and then there was half an hour's rest for the model as well as for the painter. And La Beata, deposed from acting goddess on her platform, used to subside into a very meek and modest little mortal, and pull out her knitting-needles to put the vacant time to profit as she sat on the corner of her stage. But after

three or four days, two little brass porringers, and two little coffee-cups, and two tiny measures full of powdered sugar, appeared on the little oval brass tray from the coffee-house.

"I hoped, *mia cara*," said the old painter, with as stately a courtesy as a master of ceremonies might have used to a duchess, "that you would do me the favour of saving me the discomfort of taking my collation alone."

So thenceforth the half-hour's repose was passed in a little of that quiet chat, of which Tuscans of every class are so fond; and for the subject of which, be the parties ever so much strangers to each other, they never seem to be at a loss. Very quickly, however, old Borsoli and La Beata grew to be intimate. And one day on laying down his maulstick, as the regular tap at the door announced the arrival of the boy from the café, the old man said as he poured out his portion, and handed the other miniature little bright brass coffee-pot to his guest, "Well, Beatina mia, and how do you and Pippo get on together?"

It was the first time he had ever made any allusion to her position in her home, or to any part of her affairs unconnected with the business of the painting-room. The question would have been an offensive one from any, save the most intimate friend, of her own or nearly her own time of life; but was perhaps permissible from one old enough to be her grandfather. Nor was there any feeling at La Beata's heart (poor ignorant little Yarico that she was), which made the question seem more embarrassing to her, than it might have appeared to any bride of less than a year old standing. Still there was a startled expression in her eyes, as they looked up in answer, and a slight increase of rose-colour in her pale cheeks. And it was probably in obedience to these hints, that he was treading on tender ground, that he added before she had time to reply:

"I should think the studio under the roof there must be hotter than can be pleasant, when the *cicale* are singing. But that is over now for this year."

The subject was thus skilfully brought back within the

limits of easy and indifferent gossip; and La Beata was able to answer—

“Yes! one was not cool up there in July and August. The nights were hot. But what would you have? We are poor folks, ’gnor Cecco;* and can’t pay much rent. And the air is so fresh; and the light is so good for Pippo.”

“Ay! has he been painting anything at home lately?”

“No! He is hard at work on his copy at the Gallery.”

“Ah! and a capital copy, I am told, he is making of it. Friend Pippo knows what a picture is, which is more than can be said of most of his seniors. Pippo Lonari will make his way yet! Say an old man told you so.”

“Do you think so, really?” cried little Tina, looking up with an amount of pleasure sparkling in her eyes which rarely visited them. “*Davvero, davvero*,—truly, truly,” she added, “there is nobody whom I would rather hear say as much.” And it was, truly, truly; for the old artist’s pretentious talk on all art matters, during the hours La Beata had spent in his studio, had been accepted by her at the full value of its author, and joined to his kindness, had impressed her with a very high estimate of her employer’s artistic merits.

“Yes,” continued the old man musingly, looking with kindly interest at her innocent face, beautified by the excitement of her gratification, “yes, Pippo will make his way. And when he has made it, or is beginning to make it, he won’t be content to live in a garret under the tiles with a little saint-faced Beatina for model, cook, housemaid, and—all.”

The kindly old man was sorely puzzled how to come to what he was earnestly minded to say to the simple-hearted child, who was still looking up into his face unsuspiciously, delighted with his prognostications of Pippo’s future fortunes. He thought, when he began, that it would be very easy to say the few words of grave advice, not censure, which he was anxious to impress on her, as to the desir-

* Tuscan for Signor Francesco.

ability of making her union with Pippo what it ought to be, before any change in the young painter's position might make it less easy to accomplish such a step. But he found his benevolent purpose unexpectedly difficult in the execution of it. There was a purity of heart shining out of those mild honest eyes, that were looking up into his, a guileless innocence in her utter unconsciousness of the evils and dangers of her position, which made him shrink from uttering the plain words that should destroy all this, as a soft-hearted surgeon might shrink from striking the knife into the delicate limb of a gentle child. So he cast about for some indirect mode of approaching the subject, some ambiguous insinuation, which, without too abruptly rending the veil of innocence-preserving illusion, might gradually awaken her mind to the considerations he wished to place before it. But the old painter was bad at such subtleties of language, and La Beata lent him no assistance. He was foiled by the utter absence of flaw in the perfection of her trustfulness.

"Ah, yes!" said she in reply to his first attempt, "that one understands; those who earn can spend. If we grow to be ladies and gentlemen, we must say good-bye to the dear old studio under the tiles."

"To be sure, to be sure!" said he; "ladies and gentlemen! husbands and wives, and comfortable family homes! That is the happy life to look forward to!"

There! thought the old man, I have done it now! the insinuation seemed too broad, as soon as it had passed his lips; and he glanced sharply at his companion under his eyebrows to see the effect it would produce on her. But no result of the somewhat clumsily fired point-blank shot was to be traced on the fortress he was attacking.

She was so stupidly slow-witted, was La Beata!

Good old Borsoli was a bachelor. And the fact was, that La Beata's quick sympathy was representing to her the contrast between the old man's solitary home, and the happier position of Pippo and herself, to which she fancied he was regretfully alluding.

"It is so, indeed, to my mind," said she; "but, dear sir, many are very happy, who have never married."

Now, thought he, the course is clear. To think that the little puss should defend herself so coolly.

"Perhaps they may be," he returned gravely; "but, my dear Tina, the world is harder to women than to men in this matter. For them, at all events, a union not sanctioned in the regular way by the Church, very rarely, if ever, leads to a happy life; far more often it leads to infinite misery."

Now at last she understood him. But his words produced no shock of the kind he had anticipated.

"Do you think, Signor Cecco," she asked with calmly inquiring eyes, "that the ring and the blessing at church can be of so much importance? I know there can be no happiness without the Church's blessing. But I had that at confession from dear old father Benedetto. And I know, that the Church dues ought to be paid. But Pippo will do that, when he thinks it best; and I have said all the *aves* father Benedetto gave me as a penance for not going to church to be married."

The worthy old painter found that he had embarked in a larger business than he had bargained for. He had intended to say a few words of warning to a thoughtless girl of principles lax enough to live in defiance of the laws of decency and morality. And now he seemed to be called upon to improvise a treatise beginning *ab ovo*, on the sanctity and necessity to society of the marriage tie. Feeling, however, somewhat unprepared to undertake this on the spur of the moment, he preferred confining himself in his reply to the simpler and purely prudential part of the considerations involved in the subject.

"But, my dear child," he said, "one of the reasons why it is so very necessary to be married properly at church is that then it cannot be undone again. Now, if Pippo chose to leave you, he might do so any day; and what would you be? neither maid, nor wife, nor widow, you know."

Here the shot told. But, as it was in a manner, and at a point in the conversation quite unexpected by the old painter, he did not perceive it. Two large tremulous tears gathered silently in the still up-looking eyes, and rolled slowly over the more than usually pallid cheeks. It was not the prospect of a contingency, which her whole heart and soul rejected as impossible beyond all conceivable impossibilities, which moved her; but simply the utter wretchedness of the idea presented to her imagination—as one may weep at a tragedy, the sorrows of which can by no remotest chance ever fall upon our own heads.

“But, you know, Signor Cecco, that can never happen to Pippo and me,” said she after a minute’s pause, choking down the emotion which was welling up into her throat. “That could never, never be. It is impossible. We are bound to each other till one—ay, till *both* shall have been laid at Trespiano. Do you think of me, ’gnor Cecco, that I could Those things may happen to light-hearted loves that begin in a laugh at a *merenda* in the Cascine,* to end in tears in the way you say. No! we may have done wrong to put off paying the Church fees, which ought to be paid; but there is no chance of misery from any such cause as that.”

“Poor Tina!” had probably never before uttered so many words consecutively. Yet she had not said a tenth part of what was in her heart. She felt as a reproach the supposition that she could have formed a connection not utterly indissoluble; though she would have been much puzzled to reduce her feelings on the subject to words. The sanctity of the marriage tie, and the true agreement of its behests with the needs, promptings, and aspirations of the best and purest human hearts, could not receive more forcible confirmation or more convincing proof than they were then receiving from the dumb and half-understood suggestions of the heart of that poor sinner against them. Her ignorance left her altogether undismayed in presence of the

* *Merenda*: luncheon, a picnic meal in the Florentine Hyde Park—the great holiday delight of the Florentine cockneys,

fatal unobservance of legal and ecclesiastical forms. For they have been provided by society as the only possible means of securing that which La Beata thought in her innocence might be so securely trusted to the heart she deemed a counterpart to her own. But unassisted nature sufficed to tinge her cheek with the hue of shame at the bare thought that she could be supposed to have entered on a union not indissoluble by its own intrinsic virtue.

Maestro Borsoli looked up at the sound of the little gasp poor Tina's emotion had caused to escape her, and saw that his words had struck a sensitively vibrating chord, though they had altogether failed to produce the warning effect he had intended. It was necessary to proceed; but he felt that he must use his moral scalpel cautiously and delicately.

"God grant that you and Pippo may be safe from any such evils, my dear child!" said he, replying to her last words. "But there are many reasons why the completion of all that is needful to make you legally man and wife should not be delayed. Pippo, as I was saying, will make his way in the world. He will come very likely to live among a different class of people from his present associates;—people who will perhaps that is who will certainly, my poor Tina, think evil of a wife, who the Church says is no wife. Such a union will be very inconvenient to him too;—ay! very disadvantageous when his circumstances are so changed. And how would you feel if you knew that his position was injured by your connection with him?"

La Beata felt *then* very distinctly what her feelings would be, should such a horrible vision be ever realised. She felt that the "connection" between her and Pippo (as good old Borsoli phrased it, most painfully to her, though she would have been at a loss to say why) would then, indeed, be dissoluble, and would surely be dissolved in a manner, which not even that "other class" of people could object to;—by her own speedy vanishing from the bright face of earth, and finding concealment and oblivion beneath the

cold clods of Trespiano. Not for all the world, however, could she translate her feelings into words. But again the choking spasm rose in her throat, and the big clear tears gathered in her eyes, as these unimagined forms of misery seemed to rise on the horizon of her future like hideous spectres, vague, menacing, and but indistinctly visible.

"What then ought we to do, dear Signor Francesco?" she said; "you have lived longer in the world than we have. What ought we to do?"

"Do, my dear simple child," said the old painter; "why, just go to church and be married in due form like other people. It will be all right then; and you will have no cause to look forward to the future with dread and mis-giving."

"But if ever a day should come, when I should be—what you say, Signor Francesco,—when I should be—*disadvantageous* to Pippo!" sobbed poor Tina, clasping her slender hands together, and looking the very picture of a *Madonna adolorata*.

"But, my child, you could not be so, but quite the contrary if you were his legal wife," insisted worthy Signor Borsoli. "All his best friends would delight to see him married to such a one as you. But this paying of the church-dues, which you seem to think so little of, is absolutely necessary; and no saying of penitential psalms and counting of rosaries, you little simpleton, can in any way make up for it. You must tell Pippo this. You must make him understand that you cannot consent to your marriage being any longer deferred."

The idea of Tina not consenting to aught that Pippo chose to ordain! The preposterous absurdity of such a notion struck her so forcibly, that a doubt occurred to her, whether, perhaps, after all, good old Signor Borsoli might not be talking of matters he knew very little about. Had he really understood all these things, could he have contemplated the possibility of her not consenting to do as Pippo might wish and advise? She contented herself, therefore, with recurring to her favourite formula; "Pippo

knows best," she said. The vast extent of his knowledge, as compared to her own extreme ignorance, had probably counted for much among the attractions which had given him so complete an ascendancy over her heart, and had added to love the element of reverence and unbounded trust. Poor little Yarico! It needed small experience of womanhood to foresee, that the day which should force on her the perception of the clay substratum of her golden idol, would, in making worship no longer possible, break also the heart to which it was so necessary an emotion.

"Pippo knows best," she said. "He will do about what you say, 'gnor Cecco, whatever ought to be done."

"Pippo knows!" returned the old artist, with some little irritation in his manner; "yes, no doubt Signor Pippo knows very well. He knows the truth of all I have been saying; and he ought not, therefore, to have placed you in the position you now occupy. Oh yes! Pippo knows well enough!"

There was more than enough in these few words to undo all the good that the well-meaning old man had accomplished by his attempt to open the eyes of La Beata to the real nature of her position. It was insinuated that Pippo had acted wrongly; and wrongly towards her too! To La Beata this sounded like flat blasphemy. The god of her idolatry was attacked. He who could so speak was a heretic, ignorant of the true faith; and as such, could not be trusted or believed,—on that sacred subject at all events. So she replied, not with any feeling of hostility, for her gentle nature had not in it self-assertion and force of opposition sufficient for that; but in a tone that expressed her entire persuasion of her interlocutor's total outer-court ignorance of the blessed mysteries of that home sanctuary he had presumed to criticise.

"Yes! Pippo knows best," she said, "and will certainly do whatever is best."

"Heaven send he may, my poor little Tina! At all events, you will speak to him of what we have been talking?"

"Oh, yes! I will tell him," returned she, with a little smile of compassionate superiority at the pitiable ignorance on all such subjects of the old bachelor, who could imagine it possible that such a conversation could take place and not be shared by her, at the earliest opportunity, with him who was the partner in all her thoughts, joys, and sorrows.

"And now, little one, we will just retouch that floating bit of hair behind; and then I think we may bring our sittings to an end."

So Astræa mounted to her platform; and Signor Borsoli worked away at his canvas till dusk.

At that time Pippo was wont every evening to call for her, as he came from his work at the Gallery.

"How has the work gone to-day, *amor mio*?" she said, hanging herself on to his arm, and looking up into his face with loving eyes. "I suppose another day or two will finish it?"

"It is finished, I may say," replied Pippo; "there are one or two touches I left for the prime of the light to-morrow morning. Tito Fanetti was there with Tanari to-day. They were astonished! It is not every copy, though I say it, that can stand examination with the original by the side of it. Tanari is delighted with his bargain; and, to say the truth, well he may be. I suppose your job with old Borsoli is nearly at an end too?"

"Quite at an end. The picture is almost finished; and he will not want me any more. We said our good-byes this evening."

"Best so! I shall take something in hand now to work on at home; something I shall want you for."

"What a pleasure to be together again all day at home! Yes, I am glad the Astræa is finished."

"What sort of an animal did you find the old fellow on the whole? He must be a queer fish, I should think."

"Well, I don't know. There never was a word spoken as long as the work went on; only while we were at luncheon. I told you, you know, of his offering me a cup of coffee when he took his of a day. Every day there was

my cup on the tray, when his came in. That was certainly very good-natured. Then we used to talk for half an hour while we rested."

"What did the old fellow find to talk to you about, I wonder?"

"Oh! about paintings and painters. He belittles almost every one's pictures. He has a high opinion of you, though, I can tell you. For all that, I should have liked him better, if we had parted before the talk we had over our coffee to-day."

"Why, you don't mean that he said anything to offend you? The old wretch! I swear by all the saints in the calendar, if he did—"

"No! Pippo; he is not an old wretch, poor Signor Cecco! But he did say what offended me to-day."

"Why, what the devil did he say then? Come, out with it."

La Beata hesitated a little. It had seemed to her, in Signor Borsoli's studio that morning, quite a matter of course to tell Pippo all that had passed between her and the old painter. And now she had not the slightest idea of not doing so. Yet, for some reason or other, she felt a difficulty in speaking on the subject. She would have been utterly at a loss to explain the fact to herself; but so it was, that she was conscious of an embarrassment in entering on her story, which she had never felt in speaking to Pippo before. She was vexed at feeling thus, and almost alarmed at the new phenomenon; as if the words which the old painter had spoken had already operated, like an evil spell, to raise a something between her and Pippo, which had never existed heretofore.

And it was with some degree of irritation against Signor Borsoli, as the cause of this uncomfortable sensation, that she replied:

"Why, he began talking about you and your copy of the Cardellino, what a good picture it was; and then about me . . . about us . . . and then . . . I don't know how he brought it round to that. . . he began

saying that it was very bad that we should not have been married at church."

"Oh! he began about that, did he?" interjected Pippo in no pleasant tone.

"Yes! and I did not so much mind about that, though he did say, that all sorts of sorrow and misery would come by not paying the church the lawful marriage perquisites; for, as I told him, I was quite sure, you knew best "

"I should think so, indeed!" again interrupted Pippo.

"But then he said, yes, that you knew well enough; and that it was wrong of you to to have me with you otherwise," faltered she, drawing herself up closer to his side, and looking wistfully up into his face; "and that made me angry," she continued.

"I should think it did too!" growled Pippo; "angry! why didn't you tell the old fool to mind his own business? an impertinent, hypocritical, meddling old mischief-maker! I'll teach him to put his spoon into other folks' porridge?"

"I did tell him Pippo, that it was quite certain you would do whatever was most right," pleaded poor Tina, who was surprised at the amount of anger he appeared to feel on the occasion; and who felt as if she too were visited by some portion of it.

"Of course I shall!" said Pippo, still angrily. "I know my own affairs best. I know what can be done, and what can't be done. Have you ever found, Tina, that I have been unmindful or careless in doing all I could for you everything that circumstances would permit? Have I not done my best to make you happy?"

An accurate and true estimate of the balance of good offices and advantages rendered and received by the parties might have stood somewhat thus.

For the consideration of the entire being,—body, heart, and soul,—together with uncounted and uncountable treasures of inestimable love and boundless confidence made over in fee simple, unreservedly, irrevocably, and indefinitely by the weaker to the stronger vessel, including the ungrudging payment of suit and service in every whatso-

ever need, requirement, and exigence of the latter; it is agreed, that shelter and such modicum of sustenance as may consist with the convenience and previously supplied necessities of the stronger vessel shall be provided for the weaker during the good pleasure of the stronger. It is nevertheless understood that no withdrawal of such shelter and sustenance shall in any wise enable or authorise the former party to withdraw, suspend, or determine the above recited redevances of undying love, and perfect belief, trust, and confidence.

It may be that this kind of contract, which somehow does not read pleasantly, has for that reason never been reduced to this plain form. But it is nevertheless a very, very common one; well known to all social systems in every age and every clime; and the terms of it are always the same.

This would have been, alas! the accurate statement of the relationship between Pippo and La Beata. But the makers of such contracts are not wont to consider the provisions of them accurately,—not even the comparatively prudent and calculating party, who gives so little to receive so much; and far less she who is giving away her all.

So La Beata made answer to her lord's queries respecting his performance of the conditions due from him, by a look up into his face eloquent with overflowing tenderness.

"Ever and always, my own beloved, my best treasure!" she said; "always you have striven to make me happy; and very, very happy have you made me, Pippo,—me who never knew happiness till I knew you!"

La Beata was duly performing her part of the bargain. They almost always do,—those weaker vessels!

"Well then," rejoined Pippo, as they reached the door of the house in the *Via dell' Amore*, and began to mount the long ascent to their home, "do not let us suffer mischief-makers to interfere to spoil our happiness. Be assured that I shall act for the best; and let me hear no more of the opinions of other people on the subject."

"No, Pippo! never!" said poor Tina, submissively.

"But you are not displeased with me, my own best love?" she added. For there was a something in his manner, which grated painfully in her mind, although she could not explain to herself clearly what it was.

"Displeased! No, Tina mia! Not with you, at least. Come, let us get in."

He put his arm round her waist, and stooped to kiss her on the forehead, as they entered their home. And La Beata tried to think she was comforted. But she felt as if the talk of the old painter was already bearing evil fruit. There was a kind of vague shadow, unintelligible to her, which seemed to have sprung up like an unwholesome exhalation from some evil thought, and to spread itself as a separating veil between her and Pippo. What difference could there be between his thoughts and feelings and hers on all these matters? None assuredly, La Beata said to herself.

But the dim veil would stand between her heart and his; and the consciousness of its presence made her ill at ease.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PATRINGHAMS.

ABOUT a month after the date of the conversation recounted in the last chapter, the autumnal weather in Florence was beginning to have more of winter than of summer in its composition. The season of emptiness, vacancy, and summer idleness was coming to an end; and Florence was expecting her usual immigration of winter guests. Striking is the change the physiognomy of the fair city undergoes at this period of the year! And to the taste of those who love her more unsophisticated native graces, the local colouring of her genuine Italian life, and the unstarched ease of her own undisguised character, the

change is not wholly for the better. The difference is like that between the charming woman in the easy, confidential intercourse of her *déshabillé* in the boudoir, and the same lady armed cap-a-pie for conquest, chaperonship, or other weighty duty in the full-dressed arena of the ball-room. But the lazy, out-of-doors, *laissez-aller* southern summer life must come to an end. The annual flight of strangers are at the city gates, and Florence must gird up her loins to the serious business of making her livelihood out of them.

So the lodging-houses are spruced up and painted; the shops get in their stocks of goods from London and Paris; the hotels put themselves on full war establishment; the artists give the last touches to the works they have been engaged on; and the picture-dealers and owners of "galleries" set their wares in order, and strive to meet the coming season with an array of new and special attraction.

From Florence in her summer undress, to Florence in her winter company toilet, the transformation *mutatis mutandis* is not unlike that from Oxford in the long vacation to Oxford in term time. In both cases the change indicates to the most superficial observer that the serious business of the place is about to begin. In both anxious speculations are rife as to the probable fulness of the tide of arrivals on which the activity and prosperity of the place depend.

These anxiously expected and eagerly observed arrivals may be classed in three categories; all valuable, and received with glad welcome, but with an amount of rejoicing proportioned to their fertilising properties. The lowest class consists of the waifs and strays, rambling young bachelors, strong-minded migratory old maids, or small parties of modest pretensions, who come by the diligences and railways. Next above these are the *vetturino* travellers, families occupying all the four inside and two outside places of one of those great heavy carriages, which travel from one end of Italy to the other, making easy daily journeys with the same four hardy long-tailed black roadsters. If the horses be indeed four, and not two or three merely, and if the mountain of luggage

secured to the huge platform behind by a chain and screw contrivance capable of squeezing a portmanteau in half, be of a respectable height, arrivals of this class will be received with much ringing of hall bells, and running of waiters and porters, and admission to first-floor rooms at the Hotel Vittoria, the Arno, the Nuova York, or the Gran Bretagna. But the real first-class prize, the arrival which is discussed that same night by the lodging-house owners, and touters of all kinds, is the fine large English family in its own travelling carriage, with papa and son and heir on the box, mamma with abundant daughters inside, and man-servant and maid-servant in the rumble, all complete. Great is the joy in Florence over the advent of such a prize as this. But still the anxious question has to be asked, "Here for the winter, or going on to Rome?" For the position of fair Florence on the highway to the Eternal City is the cause of many a sad slip between the cup and the lip in these matters.

One of the first arrivals in the latter part of the autumn, which followed the events that have been narrated, was of the above described valuable class. The family party in question was not developed to the full proportions attained by the finest specimens of the kind. It consisted only of one elderly gentleman on the box, one middle-aged and one young lady in the carriage, and a couple of servants in the seat behind.

It was very evident, to those familiar with such matters, that the party were not altogether strangers in Florence. The English man-servant directed the postilions in fluent but most wonderfully constructed and pronounced Italian, which was heard as gravely and understood as perfectly by them, as if it had been some mutually recognised and familiar tongue, to drive, not to any one of the hotels, but to a private house in the *Piazza Pitti*. And when the carriage reached its destination it was evident that its occupants were known and expected there. In fact, the only stranger to Florence was the younger lady. Mr. and Mrs. Patringham had passed the previous winter there; and

had returned during the summer to England to bring out with them their daughter, who had just, as the phrase goes, completed her education.

Miss Patringham—Mary, as her father called her, and Molly, as her lady-mother would, despite all remonstrances, persist in naming her—was one of those persons from whom it is difficult to remove the glance that has chanced to light on them. She had that complete harmonious beauty of feature, figure, and carriage, which is assuredly more often to be found among the higher classes of our countrywomen, than in any other race, clime, or caste in the world. She possessed in especial perfection that exquisite formation of the extremities, both hands and feet, which is so frequently declared to be the peculiar mark and privilege of high-born beauty. Mr. Patringham, however, had made his large fortune as a calico-printer; and his worthy wife had been the daughter of a member of the same trade in a much smaller way and humbler position, than her now wealthy husband.

Such were the facts; and as facts will not bend to theories, theories must accommodate themselves, as best they may, to facts. “*Fortes gignuntur fortibus et bonis;*” and pointer pups point as soon as they can stand, no doubt. Spanish grandees also by perfection of high-breeding become attenuated into imbecility, mental and corporeal. Our lads and lasses, on the other hand, have a chance of intellectual and bodily vigour and beauty, proportioned to their deficiency in “quarterings.” And genealogists, if they tell the truth, may assist puzzled physiological theorists to account for the fact, that specimens of every species of personal perfection are to be met with in every social class of our population, by pointing out the thorough mixing of all the currents of Anglo-Saxon blood, occasioned by the vicissitudes of our healthily ebbing-and-flowing social system.

I do not intend to describe Mary Patringham more particularly to the reader, for I fear we shall not see enough of her to make it necessary. He knows what a charming

English girl is without being told. But if he is an untravelled Englishman, he may be told, that he might travel the world in vain in search of anything nearly so delightful—unless perhaps he were to look on the further shore of the Atlantic, where similar causes are actively producing similar results.

Mr. Patringham was very far from having any pretensions to be called a gentleman some forty years ago, when he was beginning active life; but he was not so far from deserving that appellation, in its best sense, at the time when we make acquaintance with him. Of Mrs. Patringham, worthy good soul, and excellent wife and mother as she was, it is impossible to say as much. Whether it be that the education of the mind and feelings is completed, and becomes indelible at an earlier age in women than in men; or whether the fact is, that we imperatively demand certain graces and elegances in women, the absence of which we allow to be compounded for in the case of men, by mental cultivation and the dignity of moral worth; certain it is, that men who have risen notably in the world, are far more often able to bring their outward appearance into congruity with their changed position, than are the partners of their fortunes.

Mr. Patringham was not only a man of intelligence,—without which he would not have made ten thousand a-year by printing calico,—but he was a man of very superior intelligence, without which he would not have made himself very fairly fit to associate with the class of society in which the possession of such an income ranged him. He had a strong natural taste and feeling for art; which, studiously applied to the lower branches of it, had contributed much to his success in his business. Later in life, he had made the study of its higher manifestations his occupation and amusement. Retired leisure can hardly get comfortably along without a hobby; and Mr. Patringham had cultivated his favourite pursuit into a hobby, up to his weight, and able to carry him very pleasantly along his easy road.

"Law bless you!" said good Mrs. Patringham, "my husband couldn't live without picturs. He would go without his dinner any day, Patringham would, to look at a new pictur!"

Now Mr. Patringham was the "milordo Inglese" who had in the preceding spring ordered the copy of the *Madonna del Cardellino*.

"You may guess, Mary," said he to his daughter, as the family-party sat at breakfast the next morning, "how I have been looking forward to the pleasure of going through the galleries with you. Here we are in the very capital and head-quarters of art. This day, if you have a real love for art in you, ought to be one of the most memorable of your life. Which shall it be first, the 'Uffizi,' or the 'Pitti?' There you have it close at hand, opposite your windows. But I think it must be the Uffizi to-day; for I want to have a look at my favourite *Cardellino*."

"Ah! that's the picture that you have ordered to be copied, papa, is not it? I shall like to see that."

"But I don't know whether I shall get my copy; Tanari said that he could by no means undertake to get it for me."

"Fiddle-stick's end, Mr. Patringham! That's only to charge the more for it. You find the good English guineas, and I'll go bail you'll have your pictur fast enough."

"Well, my dear, perhaps you will turn out to be right: I am sure I hope so. And I'll tell you what, Mary, while you put on your things, I'll just run as far as Tanari's and see what has been done about it."

"No! dear papa! I shall be ready in two minutes. Let me go with you to the picture-shop. I am so impatient to see something of the town. Don't shut me up here till you come back."

"Well, my dear, run and put your things on, and we will go together. And what will you do, my love?" added he, turning to his wife.

Mrs. Patringham was a stout, comfortable-looking, round, brown lady. She was always brown; her unvarying toilette consisting of a rich coffee-coloured silk dress in

the morning, replaced by one of satin or velvet of the same colour in the evening; with a "front" of little brown curls to match across her forehead, and ribbons *en suite* in her cap.

"Oh! I shall stay at home, Mr. P. There's lots to be done and seen to, before all's straight and comfortable here. But I say, P. my dear, there's one word I want to say about Mary. She is as good a girl, Mr. P., though I say it that shouldn't, and as innocent, for all the great eddication she has had, as innocent as a sucking dove, is Mary Patringham."

"My dear," replied Mr. Patringham, as methodically as if he were answering a correspondent's letter of business, paragraph by paragraph, "I am sure Mary is a very good girl; and I don't see why you should not say so: I have no belief myself in any incompatibility between innocence and education; and young doves, my love, are not fed after the manner of the mammalia."

"Don't you believe any such thing, Mr. P. Depend on't all God's creatures are fed after the manner of their mamma's, one way or t'other. However, that's neither here nor there. But I'm anxious about Mary."

"Why, what's the matter, my dear?"

"Well, this is what sticks in my throat, Mr. P. Mary is come out here to study art. Now I am not going to say anything against art; it would not become me, you being so keen after it. Art is a very fine thing for them as have the money for it,—and a very genteel thing too; and picturs are very pretty furnitur, if they wouldn't put into them things that everybody knows ain't fit to be seen. I don't half like our Mary going to stare at a lot of picturs and images of men and women, as naked as the day they were born; and a-going, too, to the shops and places among the people that make such things. Think what sort of folks they must be as have those picturs copied off 'em!"

"To the pure all things are pure, my dear," replied her husband, didactically. "Depend upon it, the contempla-

tion of fine art refines and elevates the mind. And as to people, trust me Mary shall not be brought into contact with anything objectionable. Now then, my dear, let us be off," he added to his daughter, as she returned to the room, ready for her walk; "I am anxious to know whether I am to have my copy or not."

So off went the father and daughter, arm-in-arm, as pleasant-looking, and unmistakeably English a couple as ever walked the streets of Florence;—the tall, stout, active figure, rather broad-brimmed hat, grey hair and whiskers, smoothly-shaved chin, light-blue eye, ruddy face, and plain straight-cut garments of the father, being all as clearly legible certificates of British origin, as the pretty beaver hat, with its white feather, beaming healthy face beneath it, grey velvet-trimmed cloak, scarlet petticoat, exquisitely booted foot, and firm elastic step of the daughter.

England upon this occasion at least, had no cause to be ashamed of the specimen of her sons and maidens, as the old Lancashire manufacturer and his daughter walked through the streets of Florence, causing most heads to turn as they passed, and occasioning the often-repeated observation—

"New English comers! *Per Bacco! quante ce n'è di belle fra queste Inglesine!*"*

So they went on, turning out of the Piazza Pitti, by the *Sdrucchiolo* † *de' Pitti*, and so up the Via Maggio, over the Ponte Santa Trinità. There Mary came to a full stop as they reached the crown of that most beautiful of bridges. Looking down the river, the sun was tipping the far distant and rugged outline of the Carrara mountains, and gilding the beautiful masses of the Cascine woods in the foreground. In the other direction was the peculiar and very striking fabric of the Ponte Vecchio, the only remaining specimen in Europe of that once common mode of

* "How many beauties there are among these English girls!"

† Literally, *the slippery path leading to the Pitti*. It is a narrow street opening into the piazza directly in front of the magnificent façade of the Pitti palace.

construction, which turned a bridge into a street by loading it with dwellings, as was once the condition of old London Bridge. The irregular and singularly picturesque masses of this structure were in shadow; but the glimpse of the villa-covered hills beyond, seen through the open arches, that divide the line of buildings on the crown of the Ponte Vecchio, was flecked with capricious gleams on dark cypresses and white walls. And Arno at that autumn time was looking his best. In truth it was a point of view, to be equalled in its kind by few cities on earth.

"Oh, papa! you never led me to expect anything half so lovely as this!" cried Mary, as she paused and pressed her father's arm. "What a beautiful city! I declare myself in love with Florence;—a regular case of love at first sight!"

"Perhaps to be followed by proportionable disappointment, and hatred, like most other cases of the same sort, my dear," quoth sober fifty to enthusiast eighteen.

"Now, papa, do not be detestable! I am sure old fogeyism must be out of character at Florence."

"My love, it is the nature of papas to be detestable; and I have every reason to believe old fogeyism to be a world-wide institution. I should have been disappointed for all that, if you had passed the Ponte Santa Trinità for the first time without being struck by it. But now that you have done the proper enthusiasm very prettily in the right place, and uttered the regulation ohs! and ahs! with perfect propriety, come along and let us look after my picture."

"Caustic old fogey!" she hissed into her father's ear, administering at the same time a sharp pinch on his arm.

"My dear! The want of sensibility, which characterises fogeyism, does not extend to the epidermis. I take it, indeed, that as it recedes from the heart, it is apt to concentrate itself in the skin."

"In that case I think you may bear a few pinches yet, without much extra suffering."

And so the pair, each of whom thought the hours spent

in companionship with the other the pleasantest in their lives, went on, Mary gazing and asking questions at every step, through the Piazza Santa Trinità, and so to the picture gallery in the neighbourhood of the Piazza Santa Maria Novella, of which Mr. Patringham was in search.

We know the agreeable surprise which was in store for him there. Pippo had not yet varnished his picture; and the practised eye of the purchaser appreciated all the skill with which the expression of the original had been reproduced, and the tone imitated. As for Mary, she was enchanted, not only with her father's purchase, but with a hundred other pictures and works of art, exhibited in the extensive gallery, which had once been part of the cloisters and adjoining halls of a monastery;—statuettes, bronzes, terra-cottas, &c. &c. &c., the inexhaustible débris of the wealth of Italy in her palmy day. While her father was critically examining Pippo Lonari's work, and settling with Signor Tanari about the liberal price to be paid for it, she was ranging through the rooms and galleries, from object to object, gathering new ideas and impressions as readily and greedily as a bee collects its store in a varied flower-bed. At one moment she was gazing with more of curiosity than admiration at a quaint specimen of the art of the "trecentisti," with its long emaciated figures on a gold ground, and handsomely restored, gothic carved frame, hung high on the wall of what had once been the monks' chapter-house. In the next she was charmed by a little bit of landscape background in an Annunciation by Crivelli, placed "on the line" with other special treasures in a little sanctum, that had formerly been a chapel. Then she was crouching to examine the delicate arabesque tracery on a fragment of carved walnut-wood; and anon detecting with true artistic instinct the lines of beauty in a sadly mutilated but still precious *terra cotta* Madonna, propped up against the wall of the quondam cloister.

At last she paused longer than her impatience and the variety of novelty around her had yet permitted her to do, before a small, unframed picture, which she had found

among several other equally undistinguished canvases, on the ground leaning against the wall. Evidently it had not been deemed worthy of any prominent place, where it would have been likely to attract a purchaser's attention. It was very clearly a modern picture, and represented a young mother with her sick child, before a picture of the Madonna in a church. The infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes, was laid on the pavement at the foot of the shrine, and a ray from the lamp suspended above it fell on the sick worn face, and told plainly enough the object of the mother's prayers. She was kneeling with the child in front of her, towards which she was stretching both extended arms as recommending the little suffering one to the pity of her who had known the sorrows of a mother; while the upper part of the figure was raised to its extent; and the head, thrown back in an agony of supplication, showed an upturned face of rare and very impressive beauty, combined with an intensity of woe and passionate entreaty. It was one of those pictures from which a sympathetic gazer removes his eyes with difficulty, and which he still less readily succeeds in dismissing from his memory.

Mary remained entranced before it for several minutes, till the tears gathered in her eyes. Then returning to the room, where her father and Signor Tanari were still talking about the famous copy, she said:

"Papa! you must come and look at a picture I have found here in another room. There is a world of interesting and beautiful things of all sorts. I should have been so sorry to have missed coming here. But this one little picture has struck me more than all the rest. I dare say in my ignorance I may have bestowed my admiration very much amiss. But I must declare that it appears to me the very poetry of painting."

So saying she led her father, with Signor Tanari following them, to the remote corner in which she had found the little picture.

"Ah! Is that the picture which has so pleased the Signorina?" said Signor Tanari, well contented that his

wealthy customer's daughter should manifest so promising a disposition as an amateur, but perhaps rather disappointed that her admiration had not fallen on some more important object. "Yes; the Signorina shows her judgment. It is a very pretty little thing."

Meantime Mr. Patringham had lifted the picture and placed it on an easel; and was carefully examining it.

"Indeed, Mary," said he, "I think you have shown your judgment. It is a very pretty thing,—a very pretty picture, indeed. I suppose I must reward your discrimination by making you a present of it, eh?"

"Oh, papa, I should so like to have it!" said Mary.

"Pray, Signor Tanari," said Mr. Patringham, speaking slowly and distinctly in not *very* incorrect, though very Britishly pronounced Italian, "by whom is this picture; and what is the price of it?"

Now Signor Tanari understood English very tolerably, and could speak it at need quite as well as Mr. Patringham could speak Italian. When there was no such need, he was wont to keep his linguistic acquirements in the background. So he answered in Italian, after a moment's consideration—

"It is a strange coincidence, truly, that the Signorina should have been attracted by this little picture among all there are here; for it is by the very same artist who made the copy of the Cardellino for *Vossignoria*; a very meritorious young artist. His name is Lonari."

"Singular enough, indeed!" said Mr. Patringham. "I must make Signor Lonari's acquaintance. What is the price of the picture?"

"Only forty scudi!" returned the dealer, "it would be worth more, but that the artist is quite a young man!"

The picture had not been bought by Signor Tanari. It had only been left in his gallery by the painter, on the very remote chance of finding a purchaser. And Pippo would have been glad enough to meet with one at about sixteen dollars instead of forty. Now it would depend on Signor Tanari's generosity how much of the forty scudi would find

its way into the artist's pocket; on his generosity stimulated in some degree by the reflection that it was under the circumstances very possible that the painter might learn the price paid from the purchaser himself.

Picture dealers do not approve of acquaintanceship between picture purchasers and painters; but when Mr. Patringham at once agreed to take the picture at the price named, and then added, taking out his pocket-book and pencil, "What did you say, Signor Tanari, was the name and address of the young artist?" there was no avoiding the evil.

"Filippo Lonari is his name," said he; "and if *Vossignoria* will permit he shall wait on you."

"No! no!" persisted Mr. Patringham, with his pencil still in his hand; "a painter's studio is always the best place to see him in. Tell me where I shall find him."

So "*Filippo Lonari, Casa Barbini, Via dell' Amore, 3° piano*," was carefully entered in the pocket-book of the old man of business. And he and Mary returned to the Piazza Pitti, talking all the way of the charm of their new purchase.

CHAPTER VII.

A VISIT TO THE VIA DELL' AMORE.

THE reader will have had no difficulty in guessing whose were the features that had been reproduced on the canvas which had so powerfully excited the interest of Mary Patringham. Pippo had painted the picture shortly after the death of his sister, during the first ardour of his admiration for La Beata's peculiar beauty, and while the especial aptitude of her features and turn of character for the expression of high and pure tragic sentiment was fresh and vivid in his mind. The idea of the subject did credit to Pippo's intelligence; for the emotions required to

be represented were just such as La Beata had been at once able to comprehend and make her own. She had thrown herself into the conception with all the force of her heart and soul. Pippo had very ably transferred to canvas what he had seen before him; and a picture most admirably true to nature, and irresistibly appealing to the sympathies of all who saw it, was the result.

The copy of the Cardellino was not to be sent home till it had been varnished. But the new purchase was, at Mary's express desire, delivered at the apartment of the Piazza Pitti that same evening. Mrs. Pattingham cordially expressed her full approval and admiration of the little picture: and though she raised some objection to the "young woman kneeling to say her prayers before an image," admitted that there were at least none of those "things not fit to be seen in pictures or out of them," which had sometimes offended her in works of "high art."

Mary was eager for the projected visit to the artist's studio. But her father, though by no means likely to forget his intentions with regard to Signor Lonari, was unwilling to defer the high pleasure he had promised himself, of introducing his daughter to the great Florence galleries. So the next three or four days were passed in initiating Mary into that new world, the glories of which almost, but not quite, made her forget her own little art treasure at home.

Meanwhile, the rising fortunes of Pippo Lonari had been the talk of many a knot of struggling brother-artists, at the café Michael-Angiolo, or the Bottegone.* It was told how his copy of the Cardellino had been sold to a great English "milordo," at a fabulous price; and how it had been admired to such a degree, that the enthusiastic "milordo" had immediately made diligent inquiry for any other existing works of the same artist, and had instantly bought, for the monstrous sum of forty dollars, a little bit

* Literally "great shop," a much frequented café, on the piazza of the cathedral, so called.

of a thing;—*quel quadrettino sai, che fece della Beata in atto di preghiera davanti alla Madonna.**

"Yes, he painted it in the first days of his love-affair with the poor little thing," answered another.

"*Già! lo fece con amore; ed era belloccio, ve'!*" † added a third.

And so Pippo Lonari's great luck was the talk and envy of his little world; and none of his compeers doubted but that a career of success and fortune was open before him.

There had been also, as may be imagined, speculations, hopes, and castle-building in the studio in the Via dell' Amore. Not that Pippo had been informed of the important circumstance of the great "milordo" having asked for his address, and taken note of it in his pocket-book. Worthy Signor Tanari had not judged it opportune to communicate that fact unnecessarily. The Englishman might mean little or nothing by asking for the address. He might forget all about it: such things occurred every day. The painter and the customer might never come face to face after all, if he said nothing to Pippo of the inquiries that had been made. The proposed visit, therefore, which Mary was looking forward to with so much curiosity, was altogether unexpected in the Via dell' Amore.

None the less had Pippo and La Beata eagerly discussed the hopes to which the purchase of the little picture was calculated to give rise. Pippo was most sanguine in his expectations. With the overweening vanity and self-glorification of a temperament more French than Italian in this respect, he doubted not that his genius had at last been recognised, and that a career of fame and fortune was before him. La Beata, even had she doubted, could not have found it in her heart to mar the happiness of his day-dreams by a word of misgiving. But her faith in him was far too absolute to admit the possibility of any such

* That little picture, thou knowest, that he made of La Beata in prayer before the Madonna.

† Yes! he painted it "con amore;" and it was a bit to charm the eye, I can tell you.

doubt. His every word was gospel to her simple hero-worship. Nor was her mind ever once struck by the unvarying selfishness of those brilliant outlooks into the future, which would have been painfully apparent to any third person who should have overheard these conversations. Had poor Tina thought of looking for her own figure, in the bright phantasmagoric views of Pippo's vanity-lighted magic-lantern, she must have been struck by the total absence of it. There was no "you" in his castle-building; scarcely the faintest appearance of "we;" it was all "I, I, I." But Pippo's heart and thoughts were exclusively full of himself. Little Tina's were as entirely occupied by the same subject. So there was no clashing in their day-dreaming.

Meantime Pippo and his counsellor and model had planned a new picture, which was to be the second stepping-stone on his road to fortune. This time La Beata was to personate the heroine of a well-known legend, which tells of a girl who lost her reason on hearing tidings of the death of her lover in a far country, and who passed her whole subsequent life in ceaseless expectation of his return. Again the subject was well chosen, with reference to the special capabilities of the model. In front of a humble dwelling, in one of those strangely situated and picturesque hill villages of Tuscany, which look out from among the chestnut woods over far-winding valleys below, an aged couple were represented, watching with wistful, loving eyes the poor lost one, who, with hand up-raised to enjoin silence, was bending forward with straining ear and eye, from a rock which commanded the valley and its road far beneath, absorbed in the intense longing which had swallowed up all the other powers of the mind.

The picture was as yet only just sketched in on the canvas; but the composition already promised well. La Beata had thoroughly entered into the spirit of her part. Her attitude and expression were admirable. If only the painter could succeed in transferring to his canvas the conception as she embodied it for him, it would assuredly be

a telling picture. But the so perfect assumption of the part assigned to her in this little drama was by no means costless to La Beata. The intense identification of herself with its sufferings, by which alone she was able so completely to express them, was too real while it lasted for the ideas evoked to be summarily dismissed at pleasure from the imagination. And often, in the effort to free herself from the oppression of them, she shuddered at the thought that agony, such as she had been imagining, was the portion of some, and might be her own.

That a fate yet more dreadful than that of the unfortunate, whose lot so terrified her,—that a separation more cruel than that caused by death could be possible, was beyond the limited powers of La Beata's imagination.

One bright November morning, while the painter was at his easel, and Tina was "in position" before him, thoroughly absorbed in the deep tragedy of her part, they were disturbed by an unusually violent pull at the little bell which hung inside the door.

"Chi è?" cried she, suddenly recalled from the world of imagination to that of her own little domestic duties; while Pippo uttered an exclamation not implying benevolent feeling towards the applicant for admission.

There was no reply of "amici" in the proper open sesame form; but on opening the door she saw a servant in livery, who in very English Italian inquired if Signor Lonari lived there.

Pippo's heart beat fast as he heard the question, and sprung to the door to answer it himself. It was coming then, the fortune he had looked for! An English stranger was seeking him out in his obscurity. The great career was opening before him. He was a little disappointed at finding that it was a servant only at the door; but his golden visions shone out clearer than ever, when Mr. Ptringham's card was put into his hand, and the servant told him that his master and mistress were below, and requested permission to visit his studio.

"There is a carriage with two ladies, Pippo!" cried

Tina, who had run to peep down into the street from the window; "will they come up, too?"

"Of course they will come up!" said Pippo; "what else do you suppose they are there for? Put things in order a little, quick! Throw those plates and the flask into the bed-room! Put that copy of the Fornarina on the easel," he added, as he hurried, maulstick in hand, down stairs to receive his visitors.

Mr. Pattingham announced himself as the purchaser of the admirable copy of Raffael's great picture which Signor Lonari had been so good as to make for him, saying he was come to thank him for it, and had brought his wife and daughter to see his studio.

Pippo proceeded to usher the party up stairs, "confounding himself in excuses," as the French say, on the steepness, darkness, and length of the way which led to his abode; excuses which, indeed, appeared to be called for by the evident difficulty with which the elder lady performed the ascent. She struggled on bravely, however, till she reached the top; but arrived there with very visible signs of "distress," in wind and limb.

La Beata was standing, as the party entered the studio, at the furthest part of the large room, and looked as if she would very willingly have retreated still further, through the wall of it. The strangers advanced towards the easel in the middle of the room, and Pippo stepped forward to do the honours of his studio. But La Beata observing the laborious panting of the stout brown lady, could not refrain from gliding noiselessly to her side, and timidly inviting her to sit on the green silk sofa, which has been celebrated in a previous chapter.

The offer was gladly and graciously accepted: and the attention of the visitors was at the same time drawn, not a little to her discomfiture, on poor little Tina.

Shyness is not an ordinary characteristic of Italians of any class or age. Their freedom from it is occasioned by no extra endowment of boldness or self-confidence, but simply by an absence of self-consciousness. Their minds

are in general too objective in their nature to be liable to the embarrassment suffered by more subjective idiosyncrasies, under the consciousness of being exposed to observation. But there was a shrinking timidity in La Beata's nature, which had been unduly increased by the influence of a life passed in the twilight shade of almost complete seclusion,—a seclusion of feeling and thought, which, as has been seen, had continued even after she had been constrained to mix personally with the self-contained little artist's world, by her avocations as a painter's model. May it not, perhaps, have been also that some of those words, which had fallen from old Maestro Borsoli in the course of that memorable conversation in his studio had produced a greater effect on her mind, when they recurred to her afterwards, than they had seemed to do at the time, and that they were now bearing their fruit? Those "people of a different class," who, as the old painter warned her, would be sure to consider her position there in Pippo's studio-home a disgraceful one,—may not the idea have painfully suggested itself to her, that these strangers were probably of that unknown class? And if so, it may be supposed that Tina was then for the first time experiencing—vaguely and imperfectly—a sentiment, which a few more lessons in civilised morality would render intolerable to her.

It is curious, too, that it was Mary Pattingham of whom she seemed to herself to be most afraid. She thought she should feel less embarrassed if she were only called upon to stand before the kind-looking elderly couple, whose eyes were now resting on her. Yet Mary assuredly did not look otherwise than kind. But the causes and sources of our emotions hide themselves in so many strange ways,—of feminine emotions more especially,—that it is often difficult to guess in what remote corner of the heart to look for them.

"*Et Leicester était là !*" was the thought, which gave its sweetness to Queen Mary's triumph over her rival; and we all remember the thrill produced by the words, as uttered

by the great tragic actress who personated the hapless queen. Was there operating in Tina's heart, quite unconsciously to herself, some result of an inverse, but analogous feeling? Was there a latent consciousness that her poor little frail person, with its pale delicacy and almost ghostly beauty, was effaced into absolute nothingness by the splendid radiance of the blooming English girl? and that "Pippo was there" the while!

Whatever may have been the hidden sources of the feeling, Tina was suffering the new sensation of very painful shyness; and the matter was not mended by the evident and marked attention, and even curiosity, with which both Mr. and Miss Patringham were regarding her. Mary had absolutely started when her eyes first lighted on La Beata's face. The cause of her surprise may be easily guessed. She had at once recognised the original of the figure, which had so much impressed her, in the treasured picture her father had bought for her in the gallery of Signor Tanari; and a glance of mutual intelligence between the father and the daughter had shown that Mr. Patringham had been equally quick to see the resemblance. It would have been easy for them to exchange their remarks on the subject in English, as our aristocratic countrymen in Italian studios and such places are too apt to do. But Mary preferred the more direct and more gracious course of at once claiming acquaintance with the owner of features already so well known to her. So she stepped forward to the shrinking Italian girl with a frank smile; and with that correct and academically constructed, but most wonderfully spoken Italian, which well educated English young ladies import into Italy, said—

"I think, Signora, that I may claim to be acquainted with you in some degree, though I never had the pleasure of seeing you before. I know well by heart every feature of a certain young mother in prayer before the Virgin, with her sick child on the church pavement in front of her."

"In truth," said Mr. Patringham, less grammatically but more fluently than his daughter, "the picture is one

to impress itself on the memory. I came here with the hope of making acquaintance with the artist who painted it; but I am doubly fortunate," he added, turning and bowing with old-fashioned gallantry to poor little Tina, 'in meeting at the same time with the original of that very charming figure.'

Pippo was in a heaven of gratified vanity and golden hopes. "It was truly the greatest pleasure a poor artist could have," he said, "to be so appreciated by such a connoisseur." Yes! He had painted the little picture that had been fortunate enough to meet his lordship's approbation, *con amore*. It was sentito, and that, perhaps, was the secret of its success.

"With the rare advantage of such a sitter as the Signora Lonari," rejoined Mr. Patringham, who seeing that Tina was evidently at home in the artist's studio, concluded that she was of course his wife, "success was at least half insured."

The Signora Lonari! The words spoken so much as a matter of course, struck a chord that vibrated unpleasantly in the hearts both of Pippo and La Beata, and caused them to exchange a rapid glance, partly of mutual intelligence, but in much greater part of mutual observation, each being eager to mark how the stranger's error affected the other. As for La Beata, her suspicion was confirmed, that these rich and grand visitors most assuredly belonged to that unknown world with whose disapprobation she had been threatened. It seemed, moreover, as if the apparently very trivial circumstance of the utterance of that hitherto unpronounced title, which had never before fallen on her ear, nor suggested itself to her imagination, had in some mysterious way exercised a power of opening her intelligence to the nature of her false position to a degree, which neither her own vague ideas of right and wrong, nor worthy Maestro Borsoli's warnings had availed to effect. It opened to her a new view of the matter, and one, more comprehensible and tangible to her than the more elevated considerations on which it really depended. She was *not* the Signora Lonari. She was only La Beata! She was

assuming, then, a position to which she had no right. She was living on false pretences ;—pretending to be what she was not ! She was deceiving these English strangers. And quick as thought in the track of these newly suggested ideas, came with a pang never felt before a dread of being found out, a fear of exposure, a sense of shame, all new, and exquisitely painful in the lightning-like rapidity of their sudden stab.

It was clear, however, at all events, that she was safe for the present from the ill opinion and disparaging observation of the strangers. But her safety rested on grounds by no means calculated to lessen the embarrassing shyness she felt in their presence.

While these painful thoughts were rushing through poor Tina's mind, and Pippo was showing and explaining his new sketch to Mr. Pattingham, Mary, pleased with the opportunity of bringing her Italian to bear on a genuine native, was persevering in her determination to improve her acquaintance with La Beata. She was really attracted towards the Italian girl by one of those spontaneous sympathies which, however capricious they may seem, do not, we may well believe, manifest themselves without the existence of good and sufficient reasons, which influence our emotional nature more quickly than slower paced judgment can recognise or give any account of them.

A more striking contrast can hardly be imagined between two young girls so nearly of the same age, than that presented by Mary Pattingham and La Beata. A thousand similes might be found to illustrate it. They were to each other, as the rose to the lily of the valley ; as brilliant, warm sunlight to the pale moonbeam, &c. &c. It was not in personal appearance alone, but in everything that constitutes an individuality that the same marked contrast existed. In intellectual culture, in station, in destiny, in bodily temperament, in habiliments it was equally striking. Mary was a brilliant brunette. Her magnificent hair was several shades darker than, and almost as abundant as La Beata's chestnut-brown tresses. Both girls were beautiful ;

—beyond question eminently so. But most men would have deemed probably that the pale face and slenderer figure of the Italian in her humble dress, almost as void of modish shape as those of the lengthy saints whom she so often personated, served as a foil to the English girl's perfection of radiant youth and beaming health; while some few might have felt that all this brilliance was an advantageous background for throwing into relief the exquisite delicacy and marble purity of La Beata's more spiritual type of beauty.

It would have been impossible for a much less gentle spirit than that of poor Tina to resist the kindness of Mary Patringham's advances. And by the time her father had finished his conversation with Pippo, and had arranged that the artist should call on him in the Piazza Pitti on the next day but one for the purpose of talking over a commission for copying a certain picture in the Corsini gallery, the bashfulness of La Beata had been conquered, and the curiously contrasted pair were friends.

It is not necessary to follow the talk that ensued between Pippo and Tina, as soon as the former returned from conducting the visitors to their carriage. They were in perfect accord in praising the artistic taste, courtesy, and liberality of the English family. But it was remarkable that no allusion was made by either to that mistake of Mr. Patringham's, when he talked of La Signora Lonari. Thus there was already one subject on which perfect openness and community of feeling no longer existed between them. Tina was far from being aware of the fatal nature of this newly-arisen symptom, but she instinctively felt that it was amiss, and was painfully oppressed by the consciousness of it.

The conversation in the Patringham carriage, as it returned to the Piazza Pitti, was more completely unrestrained, for there was no topic marked as "dangerous" in the minds of any one of the family party.

"What a lovely face she has!" cried Mary. "I don't know when I have seen one that has so attracted me as

that pale, shy Signora Lonari's. I don't wonder at her husband's success in rendering the poetry of emotion; he has but to read in her features!"

"Case No. 2 of love at first sight, eh, Mary?" said her father; "unless, indeed, there may have been twenty other cases between the declaration of your passion for Florence, and your present love at first sight, which have not reached me."

"But is she not an interesting little creature?" persisted Mary. "I made sure of your sympathy, papa, this time."

"Well, my dear, and what have I said to the contrary? But it does so happen that elderly gentlemen are not so subject to those sudden attacks of love at first sight, as they might have been a quarter of a century or so before."

"Now, mamma, I appeal to you; is not Madame Lonari a very pleasing person?"

"Well, Mary," replied Mrs. Pattingham, "she seemed to me a very decent, proper-behaved young woman,—more so, to tell the truth, than that husband of hers. But I didn't see anything much to fall in love with. I should say she ought to wear flannel on her chest, by the look of her; and I'll warrant she thinks o' nothing of the sort. Young things never do, till it is too late."

"Suppose you were to give her a lecture upon the subject, mamma! It would be but charitable."

"Law, Mary! How can I go a lecturing? You'll be for sending me to Timbuctoo for a missionary next! It's ten to one I shall never set eyes on the young woman again."

"Ah! but it's a great deal more than ten to one that you will, mamma! For I have set my heart on a thing which I think papa will not object to. If I am really to turn our stay in Italy to any account in making progress with my drawing, I must have something to draw from better than copying those eternal chalk heads. I should so like to try and make a sketch from that beautiful pale face! I am sure I should do it *con amore*, as Signor Lonari said. It would give me an interest in my drawing, more than I have ever felt yet. Don't you think so, papa?"

It's quite clear, from their manner of living, that a little assistance would be acceptable. And Signora Lonari could not have any objection to coming to our house to sit to me, you know, papa! And when Signor Lonari comes to you on Thursday, I want you to make the proposal to him. Will you indulge me in this, papa?"

"I quite agree with you, my dear, that the young woman is a very striking model. Her style of face and figure is certainly singularly picturesque. I am not at all surprised at your wish to have her for a sitter. And I don't know," he added, after a moment's consideration, "that I see any objection in the way. No doubt, as you say, a little money would be acceptable enough. And the proposal might be made with delicacy, so as not to wound any susceptibilities. Well, if your mother consents, I have no objection to try the negotiation."

"There is a darling papa! I am sure mamma will make no difficulty. And now you see, mamma, you will have an opportunity of doing a little good by putting her in the right way about proper clothing. She does look very delicate, poor thing!"

"Well, my dear, I can have no objection to anything your papa thinks right. And, as I said, the young woman appeared to me a very decent body, very much so indeed. But all is not gold that glitters. And of course, Mr. P., you will make all inquiries and ascertain that she is a proper person, and quite respectable. It would not do, you know, to have anybody in the house, especially for such a purpose, that one knew nothing about."

"Certainly, my dear," returned he. "I will look to all that. But I do not imagine there can be much danger of anything of that sort. Signor Tanari recommended this Lonari to me very highly, and there can be little doubt that his wife is a perfectly respectable person."

So it was settled, to Mary's great contentment, that if no such impediment were discovered—which she herself considered to be quite out of the question—her father was on the Thursday, when Signor Lonari came, as had been

arranged, to Piazza Pitti, to propose to him to permit his wife to give Miss Patringham a certain number of sittings.

Meanwhile, symptoms that Pippo Lonari's fortunes were on the rise, and that a prosperous career was opening itself before him, began to develop themselves more decisively and rapidly, than the small events which have been narrated would to English ideas appear sufficient to account for. But in the little world of Florence much smaller circumstances may set a-flowing the tide which leads on to fortune, than could avail to produce a similar result in our larger and more severely competitive social system.

An important copy commissioned, an original picture sold on the strength of the success of the copy, a carriage full of English visitors at his door, an appointment to confer on other art matters at the house of a great milordo;—all this was more than enough to set all the artistic community of Florence talking, envying, and speculating. Already Pippo was the centre of success-worshipping knots of comrades and rivals at the café he frequented, to whom he set forth his own successes, the liberality and discrimination of his new patrons, and their admiration for his genius in somewhat more glowing colours than were warranted by the real circumstances as they had occurred.

And La Beata sat at home the while in the bleak studio under the tiles, weaving *her* golden tissue of the future also, in the web of which, one or two threads of a less brilliant hue would, despite her efforts, persist in mingling themselves. They were spun—these unfortunate mind-filaments—not so much from the words of Signor Borsoli, on the occasion of that memorable conversation in his studio, as from the manner with which Pippo had received them when repeated to him, and from those unlucky chance words which had been dropped by Mr. Patringham. Her meditations were not, therefore, of wholly unchequered rose-colour, as she sat waiting for Pippo's return from his important visit to the Piazza Pitti.

She ran to the door as she heard his foot on the stair; and saw at once, on opening it, that he brought good tidings.

"Things are going well then, *Pippo mio*," she said; "the strangers appreciate thee. Now, let us have all the story of thy interview with them! How went it? Didst thou speak with the *bella Signorina*?"

"I should think so!" vaunted Pippo. "*Mi vogliono bene, tutti quanti ve'!*"*

"I believe you! but tell me, Pippo, have they ordered anything?"

"What do you think I was called there for, eh? Ordered! of course they have. He takes the picture of the mad girl looking out for her lover;—sixty dollars, not a crazia less! Then I am to make a copy for him in the Palazzo Corsini. My fortune is made, I tell you."

"Bravo! *Pippo mio*! I knew well that thou wert worth more than any of them. Even old Signor Francesco told me as much."

And a shadow passed across the bright sky of La Beata's exultation, as the recollection of the old painter's prognostication brought back with it to her mind the other things he had said.

"But look here, Tina!" continued Pippo; "there is another thing they want. I had almost forgotten it. It seems that the Signorina paints, and she wants you to sit to her. They will pay, you understand. So I settled that you should go as soon as I can finish the new picture. I shall want three or four more days. But *per Bacco*, they are queer folks, these English! He asked me certain questions, the old fellow! I believe he was afraid you would steal the silver spoons. I reassured him! But they pay well, *e basta.*"†

The fact was that Pippo had entirely failed to comprehend the gist of the few words Mr. Patringham had said with as much delicacy as possible, in obedience to his wife's caution on the subject of *La Beata*. An Englishman in Pippo's place would have understood the drift of them in

* "They like me well, all of them, see you."
† And that is enough.

an instant. But the Florentine artist, who had no idea that any hesitation in such a matter could arise from any other consideration than a care for the safety of one's property, had answered quite at cross purposes. And Mr. Patringham imagined that he had received the most satisfactory assurances of poor Tina's "respectability," while Pippo considered that he had been called on to answer for her honesty.

To La Beata this announcement was a matter of the most unbounded astonishment. Her first sensation was one of terror at the idea of having to appear alone in a strange house among strange people of a class so entirely new to her. But the remembrance of the kind and gentle manner of the beautiful young English lady reassured her. And besides a kind of feeling that she was thus made a sharer in Pippo's rising fortune, and was in some sort bound up with him in his relationship with his new connections, was, though she rendered no account of the matter to herself, soothing and pleasurable to her. In any case Pippo had told her she was to go. So there could be nothing more to be said on the subject; and her meditations with regard to it reverted to the gown and shawl possibilities of her scanty wardrobe. And the conversation between her and Pippo passed on to the consideration of the hours of sitting, which would be necessary to complete the sketch of the new picture, so that it might be done in time for Tina to enter on her new engagement.

CHAPTER VIII.

LAUDADIO BENINCASA, THE WAX-CHANDLER.

WE all know the magic effects of success, the homage it commands, its troops of friends. And men are apt sometimes to feel with a dash of bitterness, which is perhaps

hardly reasonable, that of all those who bring the tribute of their hero-worship to success achieved, not one was able to recognise the merit, which had not yet achieved it. But such a reflection seems to suppose that those who gather around us in our day of triumph had avoided us in our day of struggle; whereas the simple fact is that they had never seen us in the crowd. The success is the candlestick on which our light must be put, before it can give light to others.

The case, however, is not quite the same when old friends who have parted company from us in adversity range up alongside as soon as a fair wind fills our sails. But it will generally be reasonable as well as wise not to judge too severely even these worshippers of a rising sun; for how few are gifted with the capacity of knowing what is worshipful, till warned of it by the worship of those around them?

Pippo had already become the centre of a circle of new friends, whose recognition of his merit he enjoyed as one of its legitimate consequences. But the most important "adhesion" to his standard belonged to the second of the above categories; and was exemplified in a personage who must be formally presented to the reader. Laudadio Benincasa was an important man in Florence. Those sufficiently inexperienced in the world's ways to estimate a man's social importance by his appearance, would certainly have never guessed that such was the case. And to those uninitiated into the obscurer paths and relationships of Italian life, the announcement of his social grade and avocation would in no case have afforded any assistance towards a right appreciation of his position. He was a little old man, very bald, and with one leg somewhat shorter than the other; probably in consequence of an accident in early life. His constant, never-changing dress seemed to indicate that the wearer was in some way connected with the Church. It consisted of a suit of very rusty black cloth; the coat cut straight at the collar, and very long and square in the tails; the waistcoat as high in the collar as the

coat; and the small-clothes fastened at the knee with small silver buckles, and continued by very coarse black worsted stockings. A very redundant and very yellow muslin neckcloth at one end, and a pair of short but very wide low cut shoes at the other, also fastened by silver buckles on the instep, completed his costume. The general effect was one of seediness, shabbiness, and utter want of gloss, yet so it was that his appearance did not produce an impression of the wearer's poverty. He always carried a handsome ivory-mounted bamboo cane for the purpose of assisting the laborious dot-and-go-one walk occasioned by his lameness; and constantly wore a small cameo set in seed pearls, stuck as a breast-pin through the ends of his neckcloth.

Such was the outward man,—almost as well known in Florence as the Campanile itself,—of Laudadio Benincasa, the wax-chandler.

It often occurs, that men of superior intelligence and energy acquire a social standing and influence quite disproportioned to, and despite of, the humble vocation in which fortune has placed them. But old Laudadio had nothing about him superior in any way; and the consideration he enjoyed was accorded him by his fellow citizens by no means in spite of, but altogether in consequence of his calling.

Is the reader puzzled to guess why the business of wax-chandling should be so highly esteemed in Florence? Let him call to mind the influence once exercised by the silver-smiths at Ephesus. The reflection may serve to put him in the way of partly understanding the secret of Signor Laudadio Benincasa's influential position among his fellow citizens. Wax candles are* to the full as necessary to "all the best interests of society" in Florence, as silver shrines and images once were in Ephesus. Your large wax-chandler in such a community as that of Florence (such as

* Should we not, rather, thanks be to God! say "were?" For assuredly the beginning of the end is rising on the horizon in this matter also.

it was, at least, up to the first half of the present century), is a man much connected in business with all the clergy, and especially with the dignitaries of the collegiate churches and ecclesiastical corporations; an habitual frequenter of sacristies, and chapter-halls; a notably devout man by the necessities of his trade (as were those Ephesian silversmiths); and a crony and confidential intimate of the devout. Romish clerical influence is ever essentially and notoriously back-stairs influence,—back-stairs from the royal palace, into whose private chambers it mounts by ways closed to all other comers, to the poor man's dwelling, much too humble to possess materially any back-stairs at all, but never too humble, if it be the abode of a domestic community, to admit of unavowed channels of communication for the passage of this all-permeating malaria. Like all other secretly operating forces, this subtle influence is shared by, and makes use of many agents and agencies besides those who might most naturally be expected to be entrusted with its secrets. In every highly complicated piece of mechanism little wheels, and very unappearing wires move larger ones, and bring into gear powerful forces. And in the wonderfully complex and most perfectly elaborated apparatus for the percolation of priestly influence and power through every part of the mass of the body social, an important share in the wielding of that power is for similar reasons often found lodged in very strange hands.

To these less apparent, but among an Italian population, recognised and in a general way understood, sources of social importance Signor Laudadio Benincasa united the more simple ones of high commercial respectability, long hereditary standing among the trading aristocracy of his native city, and very ample wealth. In a strictly metaphorical sense, the old wax-chandler was known to be "a very warm man." For his business, inherited from more than one generation of profitably wax-chandling ancestors, was a very good one. The great boast of Romanism is that it leavens with religion the whole heavy mass of daily

life, making its ordinances part and parcel of its every function and occupation. And what is Romish religion without wax candles! A trade must surely be a profitable one, which supplies wants generated in proportion to the occasions of human follies, faults, and frailties. Where wax candles are an important means for easing the twinges of that "conscience, which makes cowards of us all," it is good to be a wax-chandler. When, in addition to this, they are understood to be the most acceptable bribe that can be offered to intercessors supposed to have the power of dispensing blessings in this life, and mercy in the life beyond the grave, the trade is likely to be a brisk one. And old Laudadio was, as has been said, generally understood to be something more than commonly well off.

The term "brisk," however, is hardly that by which his business should have been characterised. It was a good, steady, profitable business; but in truth there was nothing *brisk* about it, or about his establishment. We are all acquainted with certain London firms, which from the height of their long-established reputation look down with intense contempt on all the devices of plate glass, gilding, and decoration, to which traders less firmly in possession of the market are fain to resort. Little or no display of goods is made in the windows grimy with the respectable dust of many years of these happy long-established ones. Plain black letters, long since become brown, painted on plain white door-posts long since yellow, declare, not so much the names of the prosperous firm, as the needlessness of mentioning what is so well known. No effort of any kind is visible in the conduct of these privileged places of business; but everybody knows, that it is not *their* owners whose names may some day figure in the Gazette.

Now Laudadio Benincasa's establishment was a place of this kind. It was situated in a small quiet street in the oldest part of the city, a little to the south of the cathedral. His house—for it was his own, and had been his father's, from the garret to the cellar—was an old palace, once the seignorial residence of a noble family long since extinct,

whose arms, sculptured on huge, heavy stone shields, mantled and crested, still adorned the corners of the building. It consisted of ground floor, first or noble floor—"piano nobile," as the Florentines call it,—second floor, and an open *loggia*, or arcade, supported in front by stone pillars, in place of a third floor. The front was entirely of ashlar stone, black with the weather action of centuries, with a huge and lofty *porte-cochère* in the centre, on each side of which were on the ground floor two large windows with handsome heavy stone mouldings, defended by iron gratings, not to be matched for size and massiveness in London, save at Newgate.

Such defences are common in the streets of Florence, being a legacy of the turbulent old times when every noble's house was necessarily intended to be a city fortress, capable of resisting any outbreak of popular violence. But a curious instance of the tendency men have so to accustom themselves to inevitable evils, as in process of time to look upon them as advantages, may be seen in the fact that the Florentines at the present day consider these huge prison encumbrances of their windows as ornamental! And new houses may be seen with their ground-floor rooms turned into amateur dungeons at a heavy expense, in obedience to the fashion, which has learned to think it aristocratic to live in a prison.

Signor Laudadio Benincasa, however, had removed two of the enormous gratings from the front of his house, one from each side of the entrance; and one of the windows thus liberated had been cut down to form the entrance to his shop, and the other that of his warehouse on the opposite side. The shop, occupying half the entire ground-floor front of the building, was lighted only by this doorway and by the remaining grated window, which was placed so high in the wall as to be above the level of a man's head when standing on the floor. There was, indeed, one other source of light; but it was only a glimmer, which twinkling afar in the cavernous depths of the huge vaulted room, served but to make the darkness of the place

more noticeable. This glimmer proceeded from a lamp of silver, hung up before a large representation of the Madonna and child in *basso relievo* of Lucca della Robbia ware, built into the wall at the back part of the shop.

The old wax-chandler was a widower of many years' standing; and lived with an only daughter in pleasant sunshiny rooms behind the shop and warehouse, which looked on to an old-fashioned but very pretty little garden. The first and second floors were let, the first to a banking firm, doing business chiefly with the Levant, and the second as a dwelling to one of the partners. Old Laudadio had not the slightest need of the sums incoming from the rent of these parts of his house; but neither would his comfort have been at all increased by occupying them. And a Florentine of any rank, except that of the wealthiest aristocracy, considers it as much a matter of course to let any rooms of his house, which he does not absolutely need for his own accommodation, as an Englishman would to let a vacant farm on his estate.

"CERERIA* DI LAUDADIO BENINCASA" was written in small, unappearing letters over the doorway of the shop. But the announcement was merely a compliance with trading usages: it was in no wise necessary for the information of any of Signor Benincasa's customers. From the bursar of a wealthy convent, having to bespeak the hundreds of huge yard-long candles, needed for the celebration of some well-endowed obituary anniversary mass, to the poor mother desirous of investing a few halfpence in a taper to be burned at the shrine of some saint in special repute for bringing children safely through the measles,—all knew the *cereria* and knew the wares they wanted. There they all were, from the colossal Easter-candle of delicate white wax, brilliantly painted and decorated, and destined to receive episcopal blessing, and be solemnly lighted in front of the high altar of some cathedral church, down to the slenderest and yellowest little starveling of a

* *Cereria*, wax-chandlery, from *Cera*, wax.

taper, destined to afford ease to the conscience of the poorest sinner, at the easiest possible rate.

Such was Signor Laudadio Benincasa, such the nature of his business, and such the place where it was carried on.

Now the wealthy wax-chandler had been the intimate and life-long friend of Pippo Lonari's uncle the priest, who had educated the artist, and destined him to the tonsure. This priest, Antonio Lonari, had been a rising man; and would have probably reached some one of the higher positions in the Church, had he not died early; and by doing so left his nephew Pippo at liberty to renounce his ecclesiastical destination, and follow the dictates of his own inclination. Before entering the seminary at which he had been educated, Pippo, who had been left an orphan in his infancy, had been brought up in the house of his uncle's friend Laudadio; and all days of vacation or "outing," permitted at the seminary, had been spent by him with his old friends at the *cereria*, with the wax-chandler and his daughter Beppina.

When Antonio Lonari died, worthy Signor Laudadio would have continued to give Pippo the benefit of all his friendship for his uncle, and would have been both willing and able to assist him materially in his ecclesiastical career. But the young man's conduct in refusing to follow that career, and his throwing up all the advantages, which the education already bestowed upon him, and the future patronage of his uncle's friend would have assured to him, had caused a complete breach between the young artist and Signor Benincasa; and Pippo "secularised" had been seen no more at the *cereria* nor in the pretty garden behind the old *palazzo*.

It is a fact, however, which we will for the present assume as such, without devoting a hundred pages or so to an investigation of the causes of it, that daughters are apt to regard such matters differently from their papas. And Beppina Benincasa, between whom and Pippo there had always been very good intelligence from their childhood upward, could not help feeling that this "secularisation"

of her old playmate, however abominable, was not unpardonable. She neither denied nor doubted the assertion that Pippo was a reprobate. But after she had on one or two chance occasions seen the handsome young artist in his "secularised" state of existence, she could not help feeling, argue the matter with herself as she might, that she liked the reprobate with a handsome black beard and trousers better than the unexceptionable shaveling seminarist with his black gown down to his heels. A few years ago the long-robed little priestling of some twelve years old or so, and the lively black-eyed child of ten had been as excellent friends and allies, as if the Church had not marked the former for her own. Possibly also the wealthy old wax-chandler had considered that circumstance as an important reason in favour of permitting such close acquaintance between his only child and young Lonari. But Beppina was just arriving at that time of life at which papas and daughters are sadly apt to have very decidedly opposing opinions on such subjects, when the change in Pippo's destiny caused the breach between him and her father.

This estrangement had not been submitted to by her with perfect resignation to the paternal will. Not that she had gone to the length of attempting any clandestine intercourse, either by speech or otherwise, with her old playmate, or had even ventured to defend the course he had taken, when her father expatiated on the enormity of it. She was perfectly convinced, indeed, of his wickedness and reprobate condition; but nevertheless the fact was that she did not feel at all the less kindly towards him on account of it. I should almost say—but that I don't want to give rise to the idea that Beppina was other than a good girl—that she was all the more inclined to like him for his castaway position. No! not like him for it exactly! That, of course, could not be. But she felt a lively interest in him. Yes! that is the right phrase;—felt a warm interest in his welfare. But the heart, we know, is desperately wicked;—the female heart no less so than the male; though it seems almost incredible that it should be

so ! And Beppina was constantly returning to the subject of "poor Pippo" with her father, whose heart was much more chastened in this matter, and urging that forgiveness should be extended to the scapegrace. And each time that she had chanced, in the course of the Sunday or holiday evening walk in the Cascine or on the Lungarno, to catch a sight of her old playmate, improved, alas ! in outward appearance quite as much as he was deteriorated in inward grace, she attacked old Laudadio afresh on the duty of charitable construction and forgiveness.

And Beppina's will, enforced by Beppina's eloquence, was in most cases by no means without effect on her father. But in the matter of Pippo the graceless, he had been immoveably firm. To have abandoned the sacred calling to which he had been destined was bad, and was the ostensible reason for withdrawing all countenance from so scandalous a sinner; but to have abandoned it to become a beggar, an artist without employment, or probable chance of any, was in the eyes of the careful and thrifty old tradesman—it may be surmised without lack of charity—still worse.

Such was the position of matters, when tidings of Pippo's suddenly improved prospects began to reach the ears of the old wax-chandler. The amount of good fortune which had befallen him, and of golden promise for the future, was, of course, as usual in such cases, made the most of in passing from mouth to mouth. An English *milordo* of enormous wealth and the highest rank had, it was declared, made him the most magnificent offers, and undertaken to assure him a brilliant career. His works were already sought for, and purchased before they were off the easel, &c.

Now, all this made a very material difference in worthy Signor Laudadio's estimate of his young friend Pippo's position, and of the sinfulness which he had been guilty of in reaching it. Nor did he at all attempt to disguise this change in his opinions. It appeared, then, that the young man had a real vocation for art. A real vocation, im-

planted by Providence, was assuredly not to be set aside. It was one of the cases in which success, and success only, could justify the step that had been taken. It made all the difference in every point of view. As no position or career could be more miserable and hopeless than that of an unknown unemployed painter, so there was scarcely any at all within the limits of Signor Laudadio's social sphere which could offer brighter prospects and possibilities than that of a successful well-employed artist, occupying the foremost rank in his profession. Then Beppina.

Well! Perhaps she was right after all, the little puss! She generally had a shrewd notion of what was what. So much Signor Laudadio would confess.

And with such thoughts in his head the old wax-chandler hobbled off from his shop one evening to the café, determined to hold out the olive branch to Pippo, if he should be at all willing to accept it.

Old Laudadio was in the habit of frequenting a quiet little café, where he met almost every night in the year the same set of old fellows of his own standing. But on this occasion he betook himself to the 'Bottegone,' where he knew he should be likely to meet with the rising artist. The throng of people, tables, benches, and stools, which on summer evenings encroaches in front of this favourite café on the pavement of the piazza almost half-way across the wide space between it and the cathedral, was no longer there, for the evenings had begun to be fresh. But two or three little tables, and a few rheumatism-defying lovers of open air and moonlight, were still out on each side of the entrance to the café; and there, sure enough, was Pippo smoking his cigar, and haranguing a little knot of three or four admiring listeners.

"Oh! Signor Pippo!" cried the old gentleman, as he limped up, awakening echoes from the huge towering wall of the cathedral with every thump of his stick on the pavement, "you are the very man I wanted to see!"

"To think of seeing you here, Signor Laudadio!" returned Pippo, who understood in an instant what his

old friend had come for, and why, just as well as if he had read in his heart all those considerations which have been set forth, and who was far too worldly-wise a man to allow any temper to interfere with what might be advantageous to him. "Is the Café Greco burned down? for I should think nothing else would drive you out of your old haunts."

"The Café Greco stands just where it has stood any time this thirty years," rejoined the old man, "and I should be there in my usual corner if I had not come here on purpose to bring you my congratulations. But *perdinci bacco!** it is too cold to stay here. Come in, and take a *ponce*, and let us have a talk of old times."

"With all my heart, Signor Laudadio! I have not forgotten all your kindness to me, though 'tis years ago. And how is Beppina?"

"Ah! Beppina! She has not forgotten you either. She has always been wanting me to make it up with you. But what would you have? How could I bring to my house a young fellow who had made a scandal, and was determined to go to the dogs? But now you are going quite in a different direction by what I hear, and that makes all the difference, you know."

"To be sure! to be sure!" said Pippo, not the least moved by any feeling of moral indignation to quarrel with the possibilities of bread and butter set before him in this frank profession of success-worship.

And so the chat went on in a very friendly tone till the *ponce* was out, and Pippo had told, with as much colouring as he could venture to lay on, all his past and expectations of future fortune.

"Yes! English patronage is a very fine thing!" said old Laudadio, taking his young friend by the button, as they stood at the door of the café about to separate. "They are rich, the heretics! and they spend their money.

* An exclamation invented and used by those Tuscans who are scrupulous enough to prefer avoiding the impropriety of saying "*perdio Bacco*."

But what should you say, my lad, to a commission of importance that would bring both cash and credit from

I mention no names from a high quarter? There might be such a thing to be had, and old Laudadio Benincasa might be one who possibly would have something to say in the matter. Eh!"

"Oh! Signor Laudadio!"

"Well! Basta! I have said nothing. But come to the old place, and ask Beppina how she does, and we'll talk. Good night."

"To-morrow evening, then. Good night, my kind friend!"

"And I say, Pippo, a little word in your ear!" added the old gentleman, turning and limping up to Pippo. "When one speaks of high quarters, nothing is to be done without an unblemished morality, you understand me. Young men will be young men. But there must be no scandal. Basta!"

And, so saying, he turned and hobbled off across the moonlit space, between the marble steps of the vast front of the church and the baptistery, in the direction of the *cereria*.

Pippo turned, too, towards his home, meditating much on all that had fallen from his former friend and protector.

The old wax-chandler's advance to seek a reconciliation was a very good sign—a *very* good sign indeed! He was one of those men who have an instinctive sense of coming good fortune, and whose adhesion is a prediction of it, which goes far to insure its own verification. Then his hints of possible patronage. High quarters! Could he mean the court? It was not impossible. Then his mention of Beppina—a shade more, it seemed to Pippo, than had been absolutely necessary; and that parting shot about morality—evidently alluding to poor Tina; of course there was much to think of in all this.

And Pippo strolled slowly towards the *Via dell' Amore*, much musing on the various hopes and possibilities which the talk of old Laudadio had caused to flit before his mind.

"The cautious old sacristy-haunter," said he to himself, "is not a man to 'throw words into the air,' as the Tuscan phrases mere meaningless talking. He means something—evidently has some scheme in view. Any way, it is clear the old fellow thinks it worth his while to make up to me. A shrewd judge is old Laudadio! At all events, I shall not fail to go and have a look at the old place to-morrow evening, and see how the land lies. I wonder what Beppina looks like now!"

And with these thoughts in his head the young artist came out from the deep shade of the narrow *Via del Melarancio* into the broad moonlight of the *Piazza Vecchia* in the immediate neighbourhood of his home, and saw two men coming towards him across the piazza. A few more steps enabled him to recognise our old acquaintance, Tito Fanetti, and his brother-in-law, Signor Tanari, the picture-dealer.

"It's lucky we have met you," cried Tito; "we've been to the studio to look for you. And there is La Beata sitting in the cold waiting for you, all alone in that great barn of a place, with her knitting and a little glimmer of one wick of a *lumino*! * *La poveretta*! We did not say a word to her of the matter in hand."

"And what the devil is the matter in hand?" demanded Pippo in much surprise.

"An unpleasant matter enough!" returned the other. "What on earth is this we hear about her going to that Englishman, up on the Pitti,† to sit to his daughter?"

"What do you mean?" cried Pippo, angrily; "why the devil should she not go? The Englishman proposed it. I should never have dreamed of such a thing."

"But, Signor Pippo," said Tanari, gravely, "you gave

* A *lumino*, in contradistinction to *lampione*, a lamp, is one of those tall classical-shaped brass lamps, so common throughout Tuscany, carrying three or four burners with one small wick each, on a long slender shaft, exceedingly picturesque, but not good for much in any other way.

† *Sui Pitti*, the common Florentine designation for the houses opposite the palace in the Piazza Pitti.

this Signor Patringham to understand that La Beata was your wife; and everybody knows how rigid these English people are respecting such matters."

"I!" cried Pippo; "who says so? I never told him anything of the kind. I should never have dreamed of speaking on the subject. And what business is it of anybody's whether she is my wife or not?"

"None at all, my dear fellow," said Tito, "as long as she is in your house; but when she is to be introduced into the houses of other people . it seems to me

"But surely," said Signor Tanari, "you must have given him to understand that you were married."

"I tell you I never uttered a word upon the subject in any way," rejoined Pippo. "He asked me something or other, I hardly know what, rather impertinently I thought, about her being a proper conducted person. I suppose he was afraid she would steal his daughter's handkerchiefs!"

"Pooh! pooh!" said Signor Tanari. "One can see there has been a misunderstanding. But now the fact is, that the thing won't do anyhow. You don't know these *milordi Inglesi*. I do. There would be no end of a row if La Beata, *porcetta*, were to go into his house, he fancying that he had been told that she was a married woman, and then he were to find out that the case was different. Excuse me, Signor Pippo, if I tell you that it cannot be. I introduced you to Signor Patringham. He is one of the best customers I have, and I would not for a thousand scudi that he should think he had been used as he would think if this were done. I don't speak of you, yourself. But just think whether it would be wise to give such an offence to a man who seems inclined to be of so much service to you."

"Of course Pippo won't think of it," struck in Tito. "It's deuced lucky we heard of it in time."

"But what am I to do?" rejoined Pippo, who was not the least disposed to risk any quarrel with his new patron;

"Tina was to go there to-morrow. What can I say to him?"

"I'll tell you what," said Tito, "you must say that she is ill. Poveretta! I am sure, to look at her, sitting there all alone in the dark and cold, it would be likely enough that she should be. Send in the morning to say that she is ill, and cannot come. That will put it off for a while, and we can find some remedy or other. Probably they will get another model in the meantime."

"Well," replied Pippo after a moment's pause, "that's what it must be, I suppose. I must send in the morning."

And with that the trio separated, and Pippo turned up the *Via dell' Amore*, with a fresh set of thoughts added to those which had been before occupying his mind; but which he seemed indistinctly to feel had a tendency in them pointing in a similar direction.

CHAPTER IX.

DISTINGUISHED PATRONAGE FOR SAINTS AND ARTISTS.

It was late by the time Pippo got home, very late for the habits to which La Beata had been accustomed. But he found her, as Tito had told him, patiently waiting for his return, and looking forward to her little reflected gleam of sunshine in his joyous spirits, and triumphant reports of the tokens of his coming prosperity,—what this artist of repute had said to him, the compliments that others had paid him, &c. The short quarter of an hour during which all this was retailed to her of an evening by Pippo, when he came home from the café, was the bright spot in her day, and the reward for the long dreary hours of vigil by which it was preceded.

She was sitting, when he entered, in the far part of the huge room close under the great window, from which the

bright white moonlight was streaming in. As soon as the moon had risen high enough to shine into this window, she had put out her little lamp as a measure of economy, for the olive oil universally burned in Tuscany is an expensive article; and the quantity saved by leaving the moon to do its office might suffice for the salad for the morrow's meal. As she sat there motionless, while her thoughts flitted from the somewhat alarming engagement to be fulfilled on the next day, to castle-building fancies respecting her own and Pippo's future, but with her ear unconsciously on the watch the while for his expected footstep on the stair, there was an airy tenuity of outline about the slender white-robed figure, ghostly pale in the pale white light, that so perfectly represented the idea poetical fancy is wont to form of a disembodied spirit, as to have startled any one entering the chamber with a frame of mind at all attuned to such imaginings.

Pippo's mind as he came in was busied, however, with thoughts of a very different order. La Beata started up to meet him, and instantly perceived that something was amiss. Instead of the joyous noisy good humour with which he had latterly been wont to come home full of the little café triumphs of the evening, there was a heavy frown on his brow, and he was strangely sparing of words.

"What is it, Pippo mio?" asked Tina, tenderly. "Something has gone wrong! Something has vexed you, Pippo!"

"Gone wrong!" cried Pippo, throwing himself on the old sofa; "things always do go wrong when people I'll tell you what it is, Tina, you are not looking well! You are not strong, and if you won't think for yourself, others must think for you."

La Beata was utterly amazed at this entirely new notion. It had never occurred to Pippo to fancy her ill before, or to take any special heed to her health. And now there was more of discontent and almost displeasure in his manner than of any appearance of affectionate solicitude.

"My own dear Pippo!" said she, "what has put such a notion into your head? I am quite as well as usual, trust me I am."

"I tell you that your look does not please me. You have been changing for the worse for some time past. Perhaps this cold barn of a place does not agree with you. I am sure you are not well; and I don't think you are in a fit state to take the fatigue of going out to sit for these English people."

"But we have promised, have we not? I must go. And believe me, Pippo dear, you have taken a notion into your head without any reason. Trust me, my own, I am just the same as I always am. I have nothing the matter with me."

"But I won't trust you at all upon the subject, Tina. I think you are not strong enough to undertake this job. I don't choose you to do it. And I shall write to-morrow to Mr. Patringham to tell him that you are not in health to justify your waiting on his daughter."

Tina was utterly astounded, and could not help feeling persuaded that there was something behind which Pippo did not think fit to tell her. But this last declaration of his sovereign will on the subject was decisive. And Tina would as soon have thought of rebelling against fate as against his will and pleasure. As far as her own little private preference was concerned, she was not sorry to escape from a duty which her shyness made painful to her. And had it not been that she was haunted by a feeling that the real truth of the matter had not been told her, and that something evil or disagreeable had happened to cause this sudden change in Pippo's plans, she would have been well contented with his decision. As it was, she could only acquiesce and declare her readiness to be ruled by him in all things.

The next morning when Pippo sat down to write his note to Mr. Patringham, an unforeseen difficulty presented itself before him. It was absolutely necessary to speak of La Beata by name. By what name, style, or title should

he speak of her? The Englishman conceived that he had been told that she was his wife. Was it possible so to write as to leave this to be supposed, without absolutely saying as much in words? He could find no way of doing this. Every phrase that he could think of, short of writing "my wife" or "Sig^a Lonari," seemed clearly to lead to a suspicion of the truth. And the first of all necessities was to avoid incurring the displeasure of Mr. Patringham. Then he reflected that in any case it would be necessary to avoid any further meeting at any time between La Beata and the Patringham family. The mistake, as he called it to himself, need never be found out at all. So at last he decided on writing that he was very sorry to say that *his wife* was very unwell, and that the state of her health must unfortunately prevent her from availing herself of Mr. Patringham's kind proposal.

La Beata had observed the length of time and consideration which this note had cost Pippo; as also that he sealed and carried it down stairs to find some means of sending it, without either showing it to her, or making any observation as to its contents. And it was impossible but that those unusual circumstances should add to the mystification and misgiving which oppressed her. Shortly after sending his note, and again impressing on her the fact that she was very unwell, Pippo went out, and she was left to her knitting and solitary meditations.

Pippo wished on his part to indulge also in meditations, which could, he felt, be more freely pursued elsewhere than in his home, in company with La Beata.

What a providential mercy it was, that he had been warned in time of the scrape he was on the point of getting into with Mr. Patringham! It might have ruined all his hopes. What queer people they must be, these English *milordi*! What the devil could it matter to them on what terms he and La Beata lived together? But what would one have? It was their way of thinking. And seeing that they and those like them were the people who could make or mar one's fortunes, it was necessary to fall in

with their prejudices. Then his thoughts reverted to old Laudadio and the conversation of the preceding evening. What, if the old man were really beginning to think that he might find a worse son-in-law than the rising artist? What, if Beppina really had thought of him and their old playfellow days more than he had ever thought of her? These were golden visions, indeed! And it seemed that there was nothing very improbable in them. It was evident, at all events, that the old wax-chandler meant to take him by the hand. But then it must be adieu, once for all, to "La Bohème" and its ways and associations. Laudadio Benincasa's son-in-law must be a respectable and respected citizen. And then he saw himself, in imagination, installed in that very desirable and worshipful position. He should continue to work at his profession, of course—but it would be more for love of art than for profit. He would from time to time produce a great picture, which would set all Florence talking; and might perhaps be induced to execute some work occasionally for English or American amateurs, who would strive to tempt him by fabulous prices to undertake commissions for them. The first floor of the old palace over the *cereria* would make a charming residence. The light in the rooms on the garden front was all that could be desired. But those banking people who rented it. Had they a lease? That was the principal question.

And then as he was crossing the south-east corner of the cathedral piazza towards the *Via del Proconsolo*, immersed in these thoughts, the course of them was broken by the passing of a "Misericordia" procession, which was defiling from out of the "Via Buia" * into the piazza.

Few persons can have ever visited Florence without having seen and been struck by these dismally funereal processions traversing the streets on their errands of mercy. The "Misericordia" is a brotherhood, consisting of Florentines of all ranks and professions, vowed to the ministering

* Or Dark Street; so called from its narrowness. It opens into the Piazza del Duomo, at right angles with the Via del Proconsolo.

to and relieving certain forms of distress and calamity. It dates from the 13th century, and has ever been one of the most unexceptionable forms in which the spirit of Roman Catholic charity has manifested itself. The office which the Society principally proposed to itself to undertake, at the time of its foundation five hundred years ago, was the burial of the dead. It arose from the urgent need that existed for some more efficient means to this end. The most destructive of all the great pestilences which desolated Florence again and again during the middle ages was then raging, and the dead were lying unburied in the streets of the city. Those whose office it was to bury them in normal times, had themselves fallen victims to the pestilence; and the duty of handling or even approaching the decomposing bodies was a fearfully perilous one. It was under these circumstances that the "Arch-confraternity of the Misericordia" was instituted. But in process of time, as the better organisation of society has rendered this especial "act of mercy" unnecessary, the task which the brotherhood now chiefly propose to themselves is the immediate attendance on the spot where any accident or sudden stroke of illness has occurred, and the transport of the sufferer to the hospital, or to his home, as the case may require, in their litters borne on the shoulders of six or eight of the brethren. They also attend, whenever summoned, to transport the sick, when necessary, from their homes to the hospitals. And this latter form of assistance is that which they are in these days most frequently called on to render. Notice is sent to their office, head-quarters, or oratory—for the place partakes of the nature of all these,—which is situated on the south side of the cathedral piazza, to the effect that the services of the Misericordia are needed in such or such a house in any part of the city. A large deep-toned bell, whose boding boom is well known to all dwellers in Florence, is immediately tolled to call those of the brethren who are "on the roster" for that week. One toll of the bell announces a call for the transport of a sick person to the hospital. Two strokes tell that

an accident, such as a broken limb, or other, has occurred; and three that a sudden death in some place, requiring immediate removal of the dead, has happened. But the especial characteristic and peculiarity of this ancient brotherhood is the care that is taken to provide against the good deeds done by its members being "seen of men." Each member, when, on hearing the fatal bell, he hurries to the place of rendezvous above mentioned, finds there ready for him a black linen gown, which descends to his feet, and a black peaked hood, with two holes in it for the eyes to look through, which he forthwith puts on, and becomes at once irrecongnisable by his most intimate acquaintance. The black figures, some twelve or twenty in number, form themselves silently into procession, lift on the shoulders of six or eight among them a covered litter all black like themselves, and proceed in complete silence to the place where their services are required. And every hat is doffed, even by those who treat other ecclesiastical personages and corporations with scant reverence, as the funereal looking procession passes; and every carriage draws aside to leave the way clear for the bearers of aid and consolation to the wretched. For the brotherhood of the "Misericordia" has in all ages stood very high in the good opinion of Florentines; and to be a member of it is an undoubted mark of respectability, and passport to consideration.

Pippo faced towards the procession, and lifted his hat respectfully as it passed; and the thought struck him, as he did so:—Why should not I become a member of the Misericordia? One ought to do some good in the world. It would be exactly the thing to please old Laudadio; just the very thing to indicate an intention of reforming oneself, and becoming a steady and respected member of society. I will speak to him about it this evening.

And with this thought in his head Pippo pursued his way down the *Via del Proconsolo* till he came to the corner at which the Corso falls into it. He turned up the latter street and, slowly strolling along the north side of it,

turned into the shop of Beppo Vanni the colourman, which, it will be remembered, was just opposite the apartment in which the widow Leti and her daughter had lived and carried on their business of artificial flower making.

Old Vanni was not in the shop himself; but Pippo, who like most of the artists in Florence, was more or less known there, entered into some trivial talk with the shopman, and presently asked who was living in the rooms opposite, which had been inhabited by the widow Leti some years ago, and if the same trade was still carried on there.

He was told that another lone widow had succeeded to *La Vedova Leti*, and that, as he had supposed likely, she was engaged in the same business. It is frequently the case that when the tenant of an apartment in which any trade has been long carried on vacates it by death or otherwise, the dwelling is let to some other follower of the same calling, anxious to profit by the connection which may adhere to the locality. In reply to further inquiries, he further learned that the woman's name was *Marta Sappi*, and that she lived entirely alone.

Having ascertained these facts, he left the shop, and continued his stroll more deeply immersed in thought than ever.

Pippo, to do him justice, had been and was an industrious labourer at his easel. His habit was to spend the entire morning in his studio, while *La Beata* busied herself about the duties of their little household, sat to Pippo as a model, sallied forth, basket on arm, to make any small purchases which might be required, or finally indulged in her chief pleasure of sitting with her knitting in her hand by the side of his easel, and chatting of the progress and hopes and fears connected with the work in hand. On the day in question, however, he did not return home, but spent the entire day after his visit to the shop in the *Corso* in lounging from one to another of the studios of his acquaintances. Between four and five he joined two or three of these who were going to dine at a modest

eating-house, and it was not till near seven, and long after it was dark at that season, that he returned to his studio.

"Oh! Pippo! where have you been? Thank God you are come home at last! What has happened to keep you out all day!" burst out poor Tina, when he entered the door. She had not lit any lamp, but had been walking up and down the huge nearly dark room ever since she could no longer see to do her knitting.

"Why should anything special have happened?" returned Pippo, in no very kind tone of voice. "I had business to attend to. You can't suppose that things are to go on for ever as they have done. It is absolutely necessary that I should show myself a little in the world. Many things that suited me well enough when I was a poor devil, whose existence was known only to two or three thieves of picture-dealers, won't do now that I have a footing in quite a different world. I don't know that I shall stay in this barn of a place."

"Caro mio! it is such a beautiful light for work here! Do you think that we shall get anything that will suit us as well? We have been very, very happy here, Pippo mio!" And there was an unacknowledged something at her heart, that made her voice full of tears, as she remembered this happiness. "But you know best, dear Pippo," she added, "and will do what is best, as you always do."

"Happy! yes! I am sure I have done my best to make you happy, Tina, while we have lived together here. But one cannot always think of happiness. One must think of duty also sometimes. Now, I am going to see Signor Laudadio on business, and must make myself a little decent. Where are my things?"

"But have you eaten, Pippo?" she said, as she hastened to light a lamp. "Had you not better have something to eat before going out?"

"I have dined, of course," said he, snappishly, "and I suppose you have too!"

"I, Pippo! without you!" cried poor Tina, more and more amazed at every fresh manifestation of what seemed to her a total revolution in her little world. "I waited for you."

"Upon my soul one would think you wanted to vex one! Surely you might have guessed that I was kept from coming home!" said he.

It was with difficulty that she could restrain herself from bursting into tears; but her utter bewilderment prevented her mind from realising at once the whole weight of the misery involved in the harsh unkindness of his manner. But all this time she was active in helping him to make his toilette, taking his clothes from the drawers, brushing the smallest speck of dust from the carefully laid up best coat, and busy about all those numberless and nameless little feminine cares and offices which are so far more efficient to the end in view, and so infinitely more agreeable in the administering of them, than the service of the best-drilled valet that ever brushed a coat.

So entire and unreserved had been La Beata's belief and faith that the connection between her and Pippo was necessarily and indefeasibly one for life, indissoluble by the very nature of things—so completely did she still regard it as such—that no sentiment of jealousy had ever entered her heart. She would as easily have imagined that mischief and danger might arise from her being in company with other men, as have conceived the idea that harm could come to her from his associating with other women. It is surely a mistake to consider jealousy as between man and woman a sentiment special in its kind and universally implanted in human nature. It is only a fear, generated, like all other fears, by the observation of dangers seen to be real in the world around us, and would disappear from the human mind as the occurrence in the world of the evils feared should become rare. In the meantime, each married man or woman is free from the scourge in very fair proportion to

the elevation and justice of their conception of the marriage tie.

La Beata had never felt jealousy. Had the sentiment been known to her, it might have occurred to her to guess that Pippo would hardly have been as anxious as he evidently was about his toilette, had old Laudadio been the sole object of his visit. Assuredly a woman in her position, a little wiser in the world's bad teaching, would not have put the finishing stroke to her work by making him sit down while she retraced the parting in his hair, and carefully arranged the handsome abundance of black curling locks to the best advantage.

Poor guileless little Tina! *Poor*, as we say, not perhaps without a touch of contempt in our compassion; yet how infinitely rich, come what come might, in her incapability of conceiving the fate which threatened her!

So Pippo went forth, armed for conquest, to fulfil his engagement at the *cereria*.

He found Signor Laudadio sitting in a little glazed box, partitioned off one corner of the immense shop, in deep conference with a priest, whose spruce neatness contrasted with the rusty shabbiness of the wealthy old trader very strikingly. He got up to go when Pippo made his appearance, and Signor Laudadio, merely giving the latter a nod of welcome, obsequiously limped by the side of him across the wide floor of the shop to the door. Arrived there, the priest took him by the button, and they remained on the door-step talking in low voices for a long while, as Tuscans will, appearing never able to bring their talking to an end. At last, slightly touching his huge glossy three-cornered hat in return for old Laudadio's reverential bow, the smart ecclesiastic walked off, and the wax-chandler turned to receive his other visitor.

"Good evening, Sor' Pippo! You'll excuse me if I did not welcome you before; you saw how I was engaged. Do you know his reverence? No! Ah, well! perhaps you may some day. That is the sort of people, Signor Pippo, whom it is good to know."

"To be sure! To whom do you say so, my good sir?*" To stand well in such quarters is just what is needed to a rising man in my position. But who is he?"

"Ay! ay! Who is he? and what could such a one as he have to talk about for a good half-hour with old Laudadio Benincasa? All in good time, my young friend! all in good time! But now come in, and see Beppina, and have a spell of chat."

And so saying he led the way, pounding the brick floor sonorously with his stick as he went, through a door of communication with the dwelling-rooms behind the shop and warehouse. The large and well-proportioned chamber to which he brought his visitor was a very pretty one in summer, when the large windows communicating with the garden beyond it were open. But now that these were closed and curtainless, it had, to English eyes at least, a somewhat bare and bleak appearance. There was no fireplace; and the handsomely painted and varnished brick floor was uncovered save by three or four little squares of carpet, one before the music-stool in front of a grand piano, and the others before three or four large chairs placed in a semicircle facing a huge old-fashioned sofa with its back to the wall. On a large and handsome console with richly carved gilt legs, and a magnificent slab of *giallo antico* marble, surmounted by an immense mirror in a splendidly carved gilt frame, on the opposite side of the room, was symmetrically ranged a tea service of gaudily painted, but very ordinary French porcelain, with its tall square-shaped tea-pot in the centre. The superb piece of furniture had been placed there some century and a half ago probably by the then owners of the palace; while the tea-things were the contribution of Signor Laudadio himself; and the contrast between the console and its burthen was not greater than that between the former

* A common Florentine phrase, meaning, "there is no need to tell me, who am well persuaded of it." It is a strong form of *assenso*.

and present masters of the house. In the centre of the room there was a marble table with a large lamp in the middle of it. This, however, was not lighted; its office being performed by a couple of the tall brass lamps described on a former occasion, one on the pianoforte, and the other brought in with him by the old wax-chandler. There were some loose sheets of music on the piano, but no other book of any sort, or any token of domestic occupation whatever. On the walls were a few tolerable old pictures of sacred subjects, interspersed with several intolerable framed French lithographs of battles. In the middle of the great sofa sat Beppina yawning, but very patiently awaiting the expected visitor, and far too simple and unsophisticated to make any attempt at pretending to be doing anything else besides waiting for him.

"Eccolo!" cried the old man as he entered; "here he is, Beppina! This is the gentleman who sells his pictures before they are off the easel, and has carriages full of English ladies at the door of his studio."

"Good evening, Signor Pippo," said Beppina; "truly it is a pleasure to see you again. You won't find things so much changed here as they tell me they are with you."

"But to me it seems that the change is at least as great here," said Pippo, with a very plain-speaking look of admiration at the young lady. She understood the implied compliment perfectly well, and smiled with pleasure, not the least caring to appear unconscious of his meaning.

"It pleases you to say so," she replied; "*ma che*;* I am just what I always was."

"Always the same charming little personage, no doubt. But in truth without compliment, Signora Beppina, you have reason to be content with the years that have changed a pretty child into a very lovely woman."

And Pippo's very plain-spoken homage said nothing more than the truth, and nothing that was inconsistent

* Literally "but, what!" a constantly recurring exclamation in Tuscan conversation.

with the simple and unaffected Italian ideas of what is permissible in such cases.

Beppina had, in fact, grown into a very pretty girl. She was a bright richly-coloured little brunette, with brilliant black eyes sparkling with vivacity and good humour. Her small person was a little inclined to *embonpoint*, but not more so as yet than to give that idea of rounded, soft, dimpled, partridge-like plumpness, which to some eyes is the perfection of youthful beauty. Pretty little small-boned well-fleshed hands and feet, a thoroughly good-natured mouth almost always dimpled with smiles, and showing a brilliant set of white little teeth, made up a very complete specimen of the "*beauté du diable*" description.

"But you! you have changed into a great man, they tell me. It seems to me, too, that I see some alteration hereabouts," she added with a laugh in her eye, putting her finger on her chin. "Does the talent grow with the beard, Signor Pippo? It would seem so; and in that case you must have plenty."

"Do you dislike beards, Signora Beppina?"

"I did not say that. But you, you know, Signor Pippo, had no right to have any at all. I am afraid yours came together with all sorts of bad courses."

"But he has left all those behind now," struck in old Laudadio. "It seems he has taken the path the saints marked out for him, since it is leading apparently to a good result. And henceforth, at all events, he intends to live respectably."

"Indeed, that is my notion," said Pippo, rather naïvely, speaking of it as a new idea, which he had never yet tried; "and that puts me in mind of a matter I wanted to speak to you about, my dear sir. I have been thinking that I should like to become a member of the *Misericordia*. It is a very holy work, and there is nothing more respectable."

"Bravo, my dear Pippo! bravo, in truth!" cried the old gentleman, much delighted; "it is a most excellent

idea. There are many indulgences to be enjoyed; and, as you say, it gives a man a certain character ”

“Perhaps, then, you, Signor Laudadio, could manage ”

“Don’t say another word, my dear boy. It shall be done. We’ll put all that in the right way at once. I am very glad you have determined on so thoroughly desirable a step. And it encourages me,” he continued, after a pause of consideration, “to speak to you at once of another matter, which I had in my head, but which I had intended to put off till in short, without beating the bush about it, till I saw whether you were really going to take the right end of the thread to unravel the skein, Sor’ Pippo. You won’t take it amiss; but what I was thinking of would do only for somebody standing well in certain quarters, you understand me.”

Pippo did understand in a general way that something advantageous might be within his reach, provided he could give sufficient assurances of his intention henceforth to rank himself unmistakably among the “right-thinking” members of Florentine society. He must become visibly and decidedly “respectable.” And it must be understood, that much more, or rather something very different, was meant by this in the Florentine world of that day than the words imply in their simple English sense. Right-thinking respectability involved the profession of a whole system of political and religious faith. It was to be the known adherent of the established order of things in Church and State, and the friend of those for whose advantage that order existed. Older men than any who are likely to be among the readers of these pages can remember a time, happily now passed away for ever, when the same phrases had a very similar meaning among ourselves. Nobody in Florence, at the time referred to, understood them in any other sense. And of course one of the mischievous results of such a social code was to cause the easy toleration of much that was really evil among the large class shut out from respectability by this arbitrary

definition of it, while a second was seen in a very evident tendency among those who were "respectable," by virtue of their opinions, to wink at the shortcomings of their friends in matters which would have excluded them from a class truly respectable by virtue of conduct. Of course, also, the "good things" of the world, in a state of society such as that described, fall to the lot of the "right thinkers;" and men who have a vigorous and vivid perception of the side on which their bread is buttered, and a less clear recognition of some other matters, are apt at a certain period of their lives to recognise the expediency of assuming the livery of respectability and forswearing sack, at least in public.

This was the desirable state of mind of which the eminently respectable wax-chandler was anxious to assure himself in his young friend; for it so happened that by means of the working of some of those indirect and unavowed influences, which have been described as so rife in the conduct of the social operations which in Catholic countries engage a large portion of the attention of his friends and patrons the priests, Signor Laudadio Benincasa had it in his power, if not absolutely to dispose of, at least to influence very decisively the disposition of an extremely important commission to some fortunate artist. But it was necessary, at the same time, that he should be careful not to compromise his own credit by the recommendation of any but a thoroughly "right-thinking" candidate.

The case was this. It had occurred to "a very exalted lady," as newspaper paragraphs say, to establish and bring into vogue at Florence a "new religion." Protestant readers must not suppose that any fundamental change in doctrine is implied in so startling a project. In Roman Catholic phrase, the Franciscan order, when it was first founded, was a "new religion," or new rule of observance. And the scheme which the exalted lady was bent on merely consisted in bringing forward to notice a previously obscure saint, and getting up (under distinguished patronage) a new special devotion with liturgical ceremonies, processions,

anniversary days, confraternities, and all complete—a very pleasing resource for an exalted lady hard pressed to find some scope for her unemployed activity. But for these pious purposes a visible and attractive presentiment of the newly-promoted saint is indispensable. The new religion must be introduced to its devotees in a grand procession, in which the saint's banner must be borne aloft adorned with his or her portrait of life-like size and attractive aspect. Now, Saint Filomena was the fortunate saint, whom the exalted lady, upon this occasion, delighted to honour. And, accordingly, a portrait of St. Filomena, to be carried in procession on the first day of inauguration of the new devotion, was needed. And this was the commission which Signor Laudadio Benincasa the wax-chandler thought he could find the means of putting into the hands of any protégé of his own who might be a worthy recipient of such high patronage. And it is easy to understand that the profits of such a commission would not be confined to the mere price to be paid for the picture wanted, but would be the means, in all probability, of introducing the fortunate artist to persons and places likely in many ways to prove stepping-stones on the road to fortune.

All this old Laudadio proceeded to unfold to his attentive listener with many reticences, winks, and shrugs, reiterated injunctions of the discreetest silence, and no little self-importance. To all which Pippo his ear most seriously did incline. He perfectly comprehended the whole matter before the old wax-chandler had got a quarter through his hints and roundabout explanations, and was fully alive to all the advantages that might accrue to him from carrying out the idea. He was very much persuaded, too, that the far more important prize of Beppina's hand might depend upon his success or failure in obtaining this commission. He perfectly well knew all the importance which her father would attach to a connection which might bring him, however remotely and indirectly, into contact with the small charmed circle in which the exalted lady aforesaid lived and moved. And he was finally, fully aware of the sort

of man it was necessary to appear to merit the patronage proposed to him.

In short, the old man and the young one perfectly understood each other. And when they parted, after a cordial invitation to return and see them another evening, "when they might talk of something else besides business all the time," as Beppina said, had been given by her and accepted by Pippo, it was agreed that Signor Laudadio should put all his wheels into motion for the attainment of the end in view, and that the artist should on his part neglect nothing which could help to render him worthy of the "most distinguished patronage."

CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN TO THE OLD HOME.

It was again late before Pippo reached his home. He had not returned thither immediately on leaving the *cereria*, but had spent an hour or more in sauntering slowly up and down the *Lungarno*, meditating deeply on various matters, which he felt he could debate with himself more freely in solitude than with La Beata at his elbow, and beneath the roof-tree of their common home.

When at length he entered the studio, he found La Beata again waiting for him, as on the preceding evening. But she had fallen into so deep a sleep on her chair, that the noise of his entrance failed to awake her. In fact she was utterly exhausted. What with the unwonted vigil of the previous night, the harassing and painful ponderings and misgivings which had occupied her mind all the day, and, above all, her state of inanition from absolute want of food, she was in a fair way to be really as ill as Pippo had insisted on making her out to be when he decided that she should not fulfil her engagement to Mr. Pattingham. He

would have been truly shocked had it occurred to him to guess the last of these causes of her exhaustion. When he had been vexed at finding that she had fasted while he had been dining at the eating-house, and, wholly absorbed in his preparations for his evening visit, had left her without saying anything further on the subject, he supposed—if he can be said to have supposed anything on a subject on which his mind had never rested for a moment—that of course she would take some food as soon as he was gone. At all events his thought on the matter had not gone to the extent of reminding him that there was no article of food of any sort in the house, and that poor Tina was absolutely without the means of procuring any. Perhaps he might have had some reason to find fault with her for not having reminded him of these facts; but in truth it was from no shadow of an idea of “playing victim” that she had omitted to do so. It was simply that her mind had been too thoroughly filled with other, and, despite the urgency of her bodily need, more engrossing thoughts. She had remembered nothing more about her fasting condition, when he had left her; but Nature had not forgotten to exact the penalty of neglecting her requirements.

“What, Tina! not gone to bed!” said he, crossing the room and laying his hand on her shoulder. “It would have been better to sleep in bed than on the chair, wouldn’t it?”

“Pippo dearest! I am glad you have come! I don’t know how I fell asleep. Is it late?” she said, rousing herself, and rising from her chair. “I am afraid I am not quite well, Pippo!” she added, putting her shaking little thin hand on his arm; “my head goes round, and my legs seem to give way under me. Help me to bed, Pippo, my own love!”

Pippo perhaps felt at that moment that a certain amount of “firmness” is sometimes needed for the operation of “getting off with the old love before one gets on with the new.” He had, however, sufficient presence of mind—a fine quality, as all the world knows—to turn poor Tina’s

confession of illness to immediate use for the furtherance of the business in hand.

"Well! I told you you were not well! I knew it was so this morning. This great cold garret don't do for you. I meant to have spoken to you to-night, Tina, about several matters I have been thinking of. But you are too ill now. Let us hope you will feel better to-morrow morning."

"I shall be quite well by to-morrow morning, Pippo, dear!" she said. "But let me get to bed now."

The next morning "Nature's sweet restorer" had in some degree done its usual work. La Beata did feel better. But as still an exceeding sense of fatigue and languor was heavy on her, she decided on remaining in bed a few hours later than usual; and Pippo brought her a roll and some coffee to her bedside. Just as she had taken this breakfast, and was declaring that she felt so much the better for it that she would get up, there came a ring at the door of the studio; and Pippo, on going to see who was there, found the same servant in livery who had before accompanied the Patringham carriage.

He brought a note from Mr. Patringham to Signor Lonari, expressing the concern of that gentleman and his family at Signora Lonari's indisposition, and offering, on the part of Mrs. Patringham, a visit to the invalid, if she could be of any service or comfort to her. Miss Patringham would not think, the note said, of attempting to supply the place of Signora Lonari, being sure that she should find no one who would please her so well; and they all trusted that in a few days Signora Lonari would be sufficiently recovered to permit of her carrying out the proposed sittings, which should be managed, Mr. Patringham begged to assure Signor Lonari, with every regard to his wife's delicate health.

"What a piece of good luck that the door had not been opened to the servant by La Beata going about as well as usual;—as would have been the case yesterday, or an hour or two later to-day!"

That was the first thought that rushed through Pippo's mind. The second reverted to the answer to be returned to the note. It was a disagreeable note to write. There was again the necessity of alluding to La Beata as his wife, which he had been so reluctant to do in writing on the former occasion. Then the suggested visit had to be decisively avoided. And in the third place, it was necessary to hold out as little expectation as possible that La Beata would at any future time be able to fulfil her engagement.

"Where's the ink, Tina?" he called out to her in the inner room, or rather the enclosed corner of the large room; "I must write a note to these people,—the English family. They still want you to go to them. I wish people would take No for an answer. I must tell them that you are ill in bed."

"You will find the ink on a ledge of the large window, dear. But, Pippo dearest, I feel quite well now. Would it not be better to say that I will go to them to-morrow, if that will suit?"

"A pretty thing! and you lying there in your bed! What the deuce makes you so eager to go gadding after these English people, I wonder?"

Poor Tina was, in truth, very far from eager to do anything of the kind. She was only anxious that a scheme by which it was proposed that she should contribute something to the common stock, should not be thrown up on a mistaken notion that she was unable to undertake it.

"It's only that I am quite able to earn the money, dear Pippo. We should be very glad of it, *caro mio*."

"I'll write what's best," said he; and sitting down, he produced, after some meditation and several corrections, the following letter.

"Most illustrious Sir,*

"The invalid for whom you have so kindly inquired

* The ordinary Italian style of address to one with whom the

is, I am sorry to say, still very unwell, so much so as, I fear, to leave little hope that she should be able to think for a long while to come of any such engagement as that you were kind enough to propose to her. If she does not accept the very condescending offer of your most amiable lady to visit her, I beg you to believe that it is not because she is insensible to the kindness of it. But, thank God! she is sufficiently well cared for by those on whom such duty naturally falls—(*a chi spetta tal ufficio*, were the words);—and it is, moreover, probable, that she will not remain where, as must have been but too visible to you when you honoured me with a visit, there are small means of affording her the comfort her delicate health renders necessary for her.

“ Repeating therefore, most illustrious Sir, the expression of my thanks for the kindness which has prompted your letter, I conclude, by declaring myself, with sentiments of the profoundest respect,

“ Your most devoted servant,

“ FILIPPO LONARI,

“ Painter.

“ No. 3497 Via dell' Amore., 3rd floor.”

As soon as Mr. Patringham's servant had departed with this letter, fairly copied out, sealed with a magnificent coat of arms from a huge seal ring on Pippo's finger, and addressed—

“ Alla Sua Eccellenza

L'Illustrissimo Signore

Il Sig^{re} Conte Patringham,

Città,”

Pippo asked La Beata if she felt able to get up; and on her declaring that she now felt perfectly well, he said that he must go out on business, and should be back in an hour, when he should hope to find her dressed.

writer is but slightly acquainted, or to one somewhat superior to the writer in social position

So saying he took his hat, and walked again, as the day before, in the direction of the *Via del Corso*. He did not go the shortest way thither, however, but strolled all round the cathedral, with his eyes on the pavement, and apparently in deep thought. At last he came to the destination he had been in so little haste to reach; and this time entered not the colour-shop but the door opposite; and climbing to the second story, asked if the widow Sappi lived there.

"Here! at your service, sir," said an emaciated and poverty-stricken but cleanly looking woman past middle age.

"You are the Signora Sappi? If you will permit me, I want to speak on a matter of business with you a few minutes,—a small affair, which perhaps may be of advantage to you. I am Filippo Lonari, painter. You may have heard my name."

"Oh! yes, sir; I know your name," said the little woman, as she led the way into her room, and swept an apron full of the materials of her trade off a chair, that she might offer it to her visitor. The *vedova* Sappi had, in fact, heard of Pippo Lonari not as the successful and rising artist of that name, but as the "*damo*" of Nunziatina Leti, the daughter of her predecessor in the room and business. And Signora Sappi already had a shrewd idea of the nature of the business on which the young artist had come to her; for she had lived more than fifty years in the world, and had competent experience of some at least of the ways of it.

"You carry on the flower-making trade, as the widow Leti did," said Pippo, sitting down; "one can live by it; but not over well, I am afraid."

"Yes! one lives, Signor, as you see. But as for well! Holy Virgin! It is a hard struggle to live at all!"

"You are all alone, you see, Signora Sappi; and that makes the matter worse for you than it was for Signora Leti, poor soul! Now listen. I will tell you in two words what I have come to say to you. I dare say you know

that La Nunziatina Leti and I have been together since the death of her mother. She is an angel, *poveretta* ! truly one of God's angels. And it breaks my heart to see that she is ill off at that great barn of a studio of mine. She is delicate, and it don't suit her, poor little thing. Now you know most likely, before I tell you, that she was the main support of the old woman's business here. She is full of talent, and understands your flower-making as few do. She has so much taste ! Now, in short, my idea is that she should come and live with you. You shall give her only board and lodging, and she shall help you in your manufacture. The lodging will cost you nothing. And I need not say that the keep of the poor little thing is scarcely more. I shall of course take care that all her other wants are supplied. She stands a great deal too near my heart for me to neglect her ! What do you say ? Is it a bargain ? ”

The proposal was far too evidently an advantageous one for poor *vedova* Sappi for her to doubt about accepting it. She knew very well the reputation which little Nina Leti had left in the neighbourhood ;—her gentle docility, unwearied industry, and dainty fancy in the delicate manufacture by which she earned her living. And these good qualities were to be turned to her profit, at the simple cost of affording her shelter and a modicum of food. There could be no hesitation about the matter. So it was arranged that Signora Sappi should be ready to receive La Beata at once, on her coming to her,—probably, said Pippo, with some little hesitation, that same day.

Was it that he feared he might have some difficulty in thus quietly sending La Beata back again to the spot and the life from which he had taken her, as soon as it became convenient to him to do so ? Had he any perception of the dull cold misery of the death in life to which he was about to consign the gentle, loving heart, whose only sunshine was the light of his presence and the warmth of his affection ? Did he at all realise the conditions of her return to that well-remembered dwelling and those

patient labours of her young years under circumstances so terribly different? If the long, prison-like hours and patient monotonous labour of that weary, sunless life had so paled that delicate organisation, both physically and intellectually, that no subsequent removal to open air and sunshine could avail to restore the flower to colour and vigour, even under the different conditions of those early years, what would be the effect of them now? Then if the stimulus of hope was absent, at least the canker of regret was absent also. Then there was a mother to love and to labour for. Then if there had been little brightness in the future, there were no black shadows in the past. But now! *Now*, what would the life be in that home so full of old memories, and to her so empty of all else? Did some imperfect conception of the lot to which he was about to condemn her so thrust itself before his imagination, despite his will, as to cause a doubt whether he might be able to consummate the instant execution of the sentence? If so, he had not even yet learned to appreciate justly the entirety of her devotion, her capacity of self-abnegation, and absolute trust.

In returning to the studio, as in coming from it, he did not choose the shortest way. Some feeling there was, which made him unconsciously seek to defer by a few minutes the execution of his purpose. Some brief space he felt that he needed to prepare himself for the "painful necessity" which was before him. He was determined, as he repeated to himself in his new character of a "strictly respectable man," to act uprightly and conscientiously in this matter. A little mental discipline was necessary to nerve him for the act of duty required of him; and happily his early education did not leave him at a loss, where to seek for, and how to apply it. The heart, he knew, is desperately wicked, and its impulses utterly untrustworthy. Fortunately he had a better and surer guide to rely on. He had been living these many months past in flagrant sin. He fully admitted and deplored it. It should be amply repented of;—nay, was he not already very sincerely

repenting of it? It was his bounden duty that his sin should cease. So far was clear. But what of that mode of putting an end to it suggested by old Maestro Borsoli, and so artlessly repeated to him by the "partner in his sin?" What did "the books" say on this point? Nothing can be clearer. No reparation is due unless a promise of marriage have been made. Promise of marriage! Had he ever thought of such a thing? Was La Beata (*poveretta!*) a likely sort of girl to have thought of exacting promises of any sort? And even if protestations of life-long fidelity and that sort of thing could be deemed equivalent to a promise of marriage—(and Pippo was strongly of opinion to the best of his recollection of the text-books, that they could not)—why even then, in cases where a distinct promise of marriage has been the means by which a too confiding one has been led astray, Holy Mother Church has wisely laid it down, that no reparation is required where the social position of the man is much above that of the woman.* Now Pippo felt that with his present prospects his position was very far superior to that of La Beata; so that his course of duty was clear. Still the wickedness of the heart's natural promptings made it desirable for him to delay his return home a little, while he fortified himself with these truths, and schooled his moral nature to a fixed determination to do his duty at all costs.

When at length Pippo entered the studio, he found La Beata dressed, and sitting with her knitting in her hand as usual, but with her fingers not, as usual, busy with it, before his easel, gazing sadly at the now nearly finished picture of the poor crazy girl keeping her life-long watch for her lost lover.

"What is the matter, Pippo?" she cried, starting up as she marked the heavy frown on his face. "Something bad has happened. You have been displeased."

"Nothing bad, except your being ill, Tina," he replied. "Do you feel better now?"

* This incredible doctrine is accurately taken from the authorised text-book of casuistry.

"Oh, yes! much better! I feel rather weak and tired as it were, and my head is giddy now and then. But I shall do very well, never fear!"

"Because I wanted to speak to you seriously, Tina, if you are well enough to listen to me."

"I must be bad, indeed, when I am not well enough for that, dearest! But 'seriously,' you say. Something amiss *has* happened. What is it, Pippo?"

"Nothing amiss, I tell you; on the contrary. I told you, you know, before you were obliged to confess that you were ill, that I saw very well that this miserable place was destroying your health. I do not mean to let you stay here, and I have found a place that I think will exactly suit you."

"But will it suit *you*, Pippo? You must think of the light, you know. That is the first thing. And I assure you I am very well here. I love the dear old room—the first I was ever happy in, Pippo. Besides, I can't bear that we should change, and perhaps pay more on my account."

One would suppose she was making it as difficult for me as possible! thought he, irritably. But it must be said.

"Yes!" he continued; "I have to think of the light, as you say, and it is difficult to find a place that will suit in all ways. It will in any case be necessary for me now to have a better studio, and one where I can conveniently receive the visits of strangers and people of all sorts. At the same time it is absolutely necessary that you should have a more comfortable home, and one where you would have some woman near you. You require more gentle nursing, my poor Tina, than I can give you."

The poor child was altogether mystified by this sententiously delivered oracle. He seemed to speak kind words, and yet it could not be that he meant they were to separate! Impossible! She looked up into his face with a scared expression of terror in her eye, and caught his hand as she cried, "What is it, Pippo? what are we to do?" Her mind instinctively clove to that dear "we," as though there had been a spell of safety in it.

"Why, this it is, Tina," replied he, "and I am sure you will be reasonable enough to see the truth of what I say. Since it is clear that we cannot find what we each require under the same roof, it is better that we should find it under two. That is all."

She dropped the hand she had been holding while he spoke, and, clasping her own together, looked at him with so piteous an entreaty in her face, that it forced him to seek support in the reflection that he was completing an act of imperative duty.

"Pippo!" she almost shrieked.

"Will it not be best now, Tina? Be reasonable. Consider what will be best for both parties. We shall be very near together, you know."

"Oh, Pippo! Pippo!" she cried, again snatching his hand; "must you send me away? Are you sure that it will be best for you? Are you quite sure? Think, Pippo, how happy we have been together here! Can there be no more days like those?"

"Now, Tina, this is not talking sense. I am quite sure that what I have said will be best for me and best for you. As one gets on in life it is impossible that things can always continue the same."

Her head fell on her breast, and she remained perfectly silent for two or three minutes.

"Is there no hope, Pippo?" she said at length, raising her eyes to his hard unsympathising face. "Will you not think it over again? See now, my own beloved. If it is not well that the great people who come to the studio should see me there, and interfere with me as those English people did, I could stay always in the inner room. I would never, never come out till you called me, Pippo. I should not at all mind that. I would busy myself with my knitting-needle. I could sit to you whenever you required it. And you always used to say, you know, Pippo, that you never worked so well from any other model as from your poor Tina. Could I not be of use to you still? Oh! think again—think again, Pippo! Don't

send me away from you! . . . if you still love me, Pippo," she added, while the tears began to stream down her pale cheeks.

"It is nonsense to talk in that manner, Tina," he replied, with the calm authority of superior reason. "I have told you what I think best, and what I think right for you and for me. Do not let us talk any more about it. You will find that you are making yourself miserable for nothing. I am going to place you where you will be a great deal better off than you have been here. You will very soon admit that I have acted for the best. Surely it is silly to make a misfortune out of the necessity of our living under different roofs for a time."

His conscience smote him as he uttered the last words. But he comforted himself with the reflection that, in pure consideration for the violence of her undisciplined temper, it was better to let the blow, which was inevitable, fall on her by degrees. Tina eagerly marked the words "for a time," and treasured them up for future consolation. She felt, too, that if any intelligible circumstance had parted her and Pippo for a while—such as a journey, for instance, or other such cause—it would be unreasonable to feel it, however she might dislike it, as a source of intolerable misery. Yet she instinctively refused in the present case to draw any comfort from the reflection. Perhaps there was that in the dry hard manner of the arbiter of her destiny, from which the prescient heart gathered more than from the mere words spoken.

"Have pity on me, Pippo!" she replied. "If it is good for you that I should go away from you, it is very wrong of me to be so unwilling. But my selfishness is stronger than I am. I will try to do as you wish me, Pippo, now, as I have always done. You know better than I what is best and right. I will try. But dearest love, it's very, very hard."

Pippo by this time was walking up and down the room, majestic in the consciousness of being master of the situation. The point arrived at had been more easily reached than he

had ventured to hope. La Beata sat plunged in thought for a while, following him in his walk with wistful eyes.

At last she said, speaking scarcely above a whisper, "When am I to go away, Pippo?"

"Well! it is painful to both of us, certainly. And when a painful thing has to be done, it is always best to get it over as soon as may be. It is of no use tormenting oneself with thinking of it. I thought it would vex you less upon the whole if I said nothing to you till I had made the necessary arrangements. So I have settled for you to sleep in your new home to-night, Tina."

She started, and the look of wild scared terror came back into her eyes. "This night!—to go away this very day! Oh! it is dreadfully sudden. Can there be no delay? One night, Pippo, dear! This our last day. Do that much for your poor Tina."

It would have been easy to accede to this petition, for no positive arrangement had been made with Signora Sappi to the effect that her expected inmate should arrive that day. But Pippo thought that he might have more difficulty in accomplishing his purpose on the morrow than in pushing it to an immediate completion. He could not yet reach a comprehension of the unresisting devotedness, that made his victim plastic in his hands as potter's clay. It would have been difficult for a man less fully armed by a sense of duty to have resisted that piteous appeal of clinging affection. But Pippo was too prudent a general to run the risk of endangering the victory he had already won, by delay in securing its results.

"No, Tina!" he said; "it must be as I have settled it; and believe me I am acting for the best. When anything disagreeable has to be gone through, it is wisdom, as I said before, to get it over!"

"Get it over, Pippo! Oh! it is worst of all to hear you speak in such a manner!" said the poor child, bursting into a paroxysm of tears. "How can parting be got over, except by coming together again? Let me have one day, Pippo, only one!"

"How can you go on in that way, Tina, when I have told you that it is settled? All this is to the full as painful to me as to you, depend upon it. And you only make it worse for both of us, by thus resisting my plans."

"No, Pippo! I don't resist!"—and as she said it, the utter prostration of every remnant of self-will, the piteously helpless resignation expressed in every feature of the pale wan face, and every outline of the frail drooping figure, would to a third person have given the force of irony to the words;—"I don't resist! I will go! I will do all you tell me. I will indeed, Pippo, always and in all things. And it is foolish of me to cry so. But when I am all alone"

A fresh outburst of sobbing, as the idea presented itself to her mind, prevented her from saying more; and the conqueror hastened to take possession of the ground thus abandoned to him.

"You won't be all alone, Tina," said he, with unsympathetic incapability of understanding her; "I have told you, you will be with a good kind woman, who will comfort you, and take care of you. Do you think I should propose your being alone? Now, as you say you will be guided by me, we will do at once what we must do. It will be better that you should have time to make acquaintance with the good soul before bed-time. Come, get your things together, while I go and get a *fiacre* to take us."

"Now directly! Pippo?"

"Well! I think we had better be going," said he, looking at his watch; "it is getting late. And the fact is, I am obliged to see some people this evening. That is one of the reasons why I want you to be where you will have somebody with you. I am obliged, you see, now to be often absent. And I cannot bear leaving you here all alone these long winter evenings. Don't you see, Tina? Now I'll go for the carriage. Be ready when it comes."

And so saying he went out.

For some minutes she remained sitting as he had left her, in a kind of stupor. Then suddenly remembering

that she was breaking her promise to do all his will, and that he would shortly return, and find her not ready, she got up, and with her head swimming, began hastily, yet with a dreamy sort of uncertainty, as if she hardly knew what she was doing, to gather together the few articles of her slender wardrobe. The short task was completed; Pippo had not yet come with the carriage; and Tina was standing in the middle of the large room that had been her home, and taking a last look at all the familiar objects, the remembrance of which she felt sure would never be effaced from her mind. Presently her eye rested on a small, unframed canvas, standing against the wall on the floor in a remote corner of the room. It was a portrait of himself, done by Pippo, as artists will, when they have nothing better to do, and was a striking likeness. Tina had often fed her eyes with it, during the hours of Pippo's absence. Now she darted towards it, and taking it in her hands, was looking on it, while the big tears dropped one after another on the canvas, when he came in.

"I am ready, Pippo!" she said, as he entered with a sort of nervous hurry; "but I may take this with me, may I not? You do not know what a comfort it would be to me. You will give it me, Pippo, won't you?" she added, as he hesitated before answering her.

He had been on the point of assenting to her wish. But sundry considerations flashed across his mind, which suggested to him the prudence of pausing before he did so. Supposing circumstances should arise which might make it desirable that all youthful indiscretions should be consigned to oblivion! He had no present intention of abandoning the poor girl. God forbid! But nevertheless might it not be as well to avoid leaving in her hands such a memorial? Who knew what connections she might hereafter form, and into whose hands the picture might fall, and what use might be made of it? Besides, was it not wiser and better for her that she should *not* have such a means of keeping the memory of by-gones alive? Would it not be better for her to forget?

So he answered: "Nay, Tina, I cannot let you run away with that, at least not now; for I am going to make use of the sketch for a picture I have in my mind." (A picture, planned and studied without any communication with her! This utterly unprecedented novelty inflicted its own separate stab.) "But perhaps at some future time," he added, "I shall have the pleasure of giving it you."

She put the picture down after one long look at it, without saying another word. One additional pang more or less appeared hardly to have the power of rousing her from her almost lethargic state of resignation and acquiescence. But her heart seemed to her to be becoming colder and more numb every minute. She would not have been able to give any account of the phenomenon to herself, and much less to another; but she felt in every fibre of her heart the strange coldness of his manner to her, the distance which seemed by some mysterious and irresistible agency to increase every instant between her and him, whom she had deemed a part of herself; and the impassable barrier which, gathering out of nothing like a baleful cloud, was rapidly rendering the passage of all sympathy from the one heart to the other impossible. She neither understood nor reasoned on anything of all this. But the most skilled and subtle analyst of the infinite modes in which one human heart may impress and influence another, could not have felt every gradation of it more acutely.

Pippo began to busy himself with carrying down the few small matters which made the sum of La Beata's worldly goods; and she continued standing on the spot where she had put the picture out of her hands, gazing around her in a sort of stupor. Presently he came bounding up the stairs, and with a brisk cheery manner told her that all was ready.

"Come along, Tina!" said he: "don't stand dreaming over it! We must not keep the *fiacre* waiting, or the fellow will charge his extra time. Come along!"

She suffered herself to be led down the stairs, and handed into the coach without speaking a word. She had

never made the least inquiry as to her destination. And when she heard him order the driver to drive to the *Via del Corso*, the familiar address did not seem to make the smallest impression upon her. As Pippo seated himself in the carriage by her side, she took his hand in hers, and pressed it almost convulsively, while the tears were rolling silently down her cheeks.

"Are you quite, quite sure, Pippo," she said, after they had been in the carriage some minutes, "that it is good for you for me to go away?"

"Quite sure that it will be better for both of us," he answered, and that was the only word she spoke during the drive.

Pippo was a little embarrassed at her having asked nothing respecting the place she was to be taken to. He doubted whether it would be best to tell her at once where she was going, or to wait till her arrival told its own story. He decided on the latter, although he was not without some expectation that the unexpected discovery on her part of what home it was that he had selected for her might produce some outbreak of feeling, which in the presence of Signora Sappi might be better suppressed.

But when the coach stopped at the well-known door of her old home, it might have been supposed that La Beata had known perfectly well that that was her destination. She made no remark whatever, but proceeded to climb wearily to the old room on the second floor, as if it had never ceased to be her dwelling. Pippo could not understand it, and fancied that he must have mentioned to her the arrangement he had made inadvertently. The fact was that in the passive apathy of her despair, he might have led her anywhere,—the strangest place would hardly have roused her to remark it. But it seemed to her quite natural that she should return to the old familiar house. The sentence that she was to leave Pippo seemed to her to involve her return thither. All her life between her departure from that house and the present was wiped out and annihilated: and it appeared a matter of course to her

to find herself brought back to the point from which she started. It was like the return to the ordinary routine of daily life in the fairy story-books, after a charmed excursion into fairy-land.

"Good day, Signora Sappi!" said Pippo, as the widow appeared at her door to receive her lodger; "Here we are! She is not very well to-day, poor Tina; and is a good deal beat with making the change, you know. But she knows it is for the best; she will be better after a night's rest; and I have no doubt that you will get on excellently well together. This is Signora Sappi, Tina, your new landlady."

"Good day, Signora!" said she, sitting down on the first chair she could see in the well-known room, for it was as much as she could do to stand; "excuse me, I am very tired to-day."

"I hope, Signora, that I shall be able to make you comfortable here," said the woman, kindly.

"It is very good of you to receive me," replied Tina, and then added hurriedly, as if the thought flashed across her that it was necessary to save Pippo from any suspicion or blame in the matter; "It is best for me to leave Pippo, because because "

But as the reasons were not at hand, Pippo put in quickly—

"The studio I have is not a place, Signora Sappi, where she can have the comforts her health requires. With you here she will soon get well."

A very unobservant eye could hardly have failed to see that physical health was at all events not the principal of La Beata's ailments. Her features had all the traces of much and recent weeping, and she appeared so utterly absorbed by some oppressing sorrow as to be scarcely able to constrain herself to take cognisance of what was passing before her. But the worthy widow Sappi manifested neither surprise nor curiosity at what she saw. She had lived—maid, wife, and widow—more than fifty years in the world, and the entire plot, beginning, progress, and *dénouement* of the little drama, one scene of the last act of

which was passing before her, was quite as perfectly intelligible to her, as if she had witnessed the action of the entire piece.

To the world-worn widow it was the old, old story ;—a “disgrazia,” not necessarily involving any moral turpitude on the part of any of the actors concerned in it—possibly admitting of mitigation by due use of candles and rosaries in the proper quarters, but evidently not calling for interference on her part. Though she felt, therefore, no indignation against the handsome young artist, as she opened the door for him to depart, she was none the less anxious as she returned on closing it after him, to say or do anything within the limits of her simple understanding and small power to alleviate the sorrows of the victim.

And it is easy to imagine that consolations drawn from such a view of the case were more tolerable to La Beata’s unswerving fidelity of affection, than any based on blame of her heart’s idol could have been. It is true, that Signora Sappi’s first well-meant attempts to treat the case as one already arrived at the stage, which to her experienced eyes it had clearly reached, were met by vehement and indignant protestations of Pippo’s unalterable affection, and the temporary nature of their separation. But as soon as the widow perceived that her patient was in an earlier phase of her misfortune than she had imagined, she adopted her tone and treatment accordingly, only lamenting to herself that so much misery still remained to be developed from what she too well knew to be the inevitable future.

And the next day Tina was in her old place, at her old occupation among the bits of painted calico and waxed paper, very wan, very silent, very miserable, anxiously endeavouring to do her utmost in the interest of her entertainer, but with the best part of her mind in her ear, painfully watching during all the long hours of the day for the footstep on the stair, which came not.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW YEAR'S DAY IN THE VIA DEL CORSO.

THE year in which the events that have been narrated took place was a marked one in Florence—marked by a great calamity, the immediate results of which were felt for several years, and the recollection of which, notwithstanding all the world-famous changes and revolutions which have since that time stirred up from its foundations all the social system of the country, is yet fresh in the minds of the Florentines. It was the year of the great flood—of the last of the great floods that have befallen Florence, that is to say, for there have been many such in the course of its history.

It is curious that Florence, in the middle of the nineteenth century, should suffer from the overbearing injustice and wrong done by Imperial Rome to the obscure provincial municipium on the banks of the Arno some two thousand years ago. But such is, in fact, the case. In the singularly situated low-lying valley of the Chiana, a basin receiving the drainage of a large tract of country between the Arno and the Tiber, there is a watershed of such trifling elevation that it was easy, by an artificial modification of it, to direct the waters from the latter and towards the former of these rivers. Now the Romans, as we remember, had seen “yellow Tiber, with its waters furiously dashed from the Tuscan bank, rushing to overthrow the monuments of the king, and the temple of Vesta.” And in their anxiety to avoid a repetition of such sights, little caring what monuments and temples might be thrown down in distant subject provinces, they constructed earthworks, which threw the waters of the Chiana entirely into the already overcharged Arno. The result was very soon seen in disastrous floods in all the lower Valdarno;

and records exist, from a very early period, of petitions and remonstrances from the inhabitants to the masters of the world on the subject. But mortal masters of worlds are little apt to listen to such complaints from subject peoples, and the valley of the Arno and its city have been liable to destructive floods from that time to this.*

The autumn had been remarkably fine in the year alluded to, and very little rain had fallen. The "city of flowers" was, at the beginning of November, full to overflowing with visitors, and there was every promise of a brisk and prosperous season. Suddenly a heavy and unusually continuous fall of rain for some fifty or sixty hours sufficed to change the prospect very completely. A little before twelve o'clock one night, the guards appointed to watch the river in time of flood warned the inmates of the jewellers' shops situated on the old bridge to remove in all haste their stocks and themselves into places of greater safety. A few hours later the river had overflowed the Lungarno on both sides, as the streets are called, which run along the terraced banks of the Arno, and was raging and tumbling tempestuously in one broad turbid yellow torrent, reaching from house to house. The brave old bridge stood firm, but for many hours it was thought to be in imminent danger, and another two feet of rise in the waters would assuredly have swept it away. The inhabitants of all the low-lying part of the town woke the next morning to find the streets before their doors turned into eddyng torrents—those, at least, whose homes on upper floors placed themselves out of reach of the water—for the dwellers in ground-floors, the shopkeepers, and the poorer classes living in smaller tenements, the first floors of which were not high enough or solid enough to be safe, had been all night busy in removing such of their property as could be moved in the time out of the reach of the water. In a great many streets there was no quitting the houses, at least by the doors of them, that morning. And in many

* After the flood referred to in the text, works were executed, which, it is hoped, will prevent the recurrence of similar disasters,

instances those who left home early in the morning, anxious to see the state of the city, as was the case with the present writer, found it impossible a few hours later to return.

During all that terrible day the raging river continued to whirl along before the eyes of the helpless gazing citizens all sorts of trophies of its destructive triumphs in the upper part of its course. Broken bridges, bodies of animals, domestic furniture, the wreck of farm-yards, were dashed by in mad confusion—the usual work of insurgent waters! But one incident there was which is worth recording. A sleeping infant floating in its cradle came down safely riding the mud-coloured heaving torrent, and by means of a line thrown over it was drawn unhurt to the shore.

Within the city there was very little, if any, loss of life, but the destruction of property was enormous. The worst part of the evil, however, remained after the waters had subsided, in the mischief done to the dwellings of the poorer classes. The waters came down heavily charged with the friable yellow soil of the upper valley of the Arno, and the hills which enclose it. This they deposited in every street and in every house they entered in masses often three or four feet in thickness. And it is easy to imagine the unhealthy state in which such a visitation must have left the dwellings of those who had no choice but to return to them as soon as the water was out of them. Rarely, save in its mediæval days of pestilence, has Florence known so unhealthy a season as that which followed the great flood.

The *Via del Corso* just escaped the visitation. The waters rose to within a few inches of the level at which it also would have been flooded. But the effects of the malaria generated by whole streets of dwellings saturated with damp, and for many weeks half filled with steaming mud, did not confine themselves within the limits actually reached by the water. The evil influence was felt throughout the lower and more densely inhabited parts of the city, and the seeds of permanent disease were implanted in the

constitutions of those who had not sufficient energy of vital force to resist them.

For such persons as were well circumstanced, or whose houses had been far removed from the waters, the great flood became in a few days a topic for idle conversation. The waters retired within their boundaries. The streets at least, if not the houses of the poor, were cleared of mud. The foreign visitors subscribed generously for the relief of the sufferers. The priests struggled hard, and for the most part successfully, to prevent any aid from reaching them save through their own hands. The heretics refused to pay their contributions to utterly irresponsible and unaccountable priests. The poor people were told by them that the wealthy English strangers refused to do anything to alleviate the general distress. And a great deal of acrimonious talk, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, was got out of the occasion—all as usual in such cases.

During the long, long day succeeding that on which La Beata had returned to her earliest home in the Corso, Pippo had not been near the place. Gradually as the dull hours wore on, the sickness of the heart, which comes of hope deferred, assailed her with ever-increasing intensity. She had not admitted the possibility of a doubt that he would come during the day. When the morning had passed, she told herself that of course he would take a good spell of work at his easel before leaving the studio. When the afternoon was far spent, she reflected that naturally the best economy of time would lead him to choose the twilight hour for his visit. Probably he would spend the evening there. That would be far better than a visit during the day. Then as the dusk grew into darkness she could not refrain from running backward and forward to the window, and at each fruitless examination of the darkening street the misery of hope slowly, yet all too rapidly, changing to despair, settled its cold weight more heavily upon her hear

The next day he came. But his visit was, as might have been easily predicted, worse than none at all. La

Beata would not have admitted to herself that it was so, though every word had inflicted a separate stab, and every incident of it had furnished material for subsequent painful rumination and misgiving. He had come in about eleven o'clock in the morning brisk, and to all appearance in high good humour, but evidently in a great hurry.

"Well, Tina, how goes it?" he cried, as he bustled into the room, while she bounded forward and would have thrown herself into his arms, had he not prevented her by seizing her hand and shaking it in a frank old-friend sort of style, which said as plain as words could have said it, "Understand that this is the sort of footing we are to be on together for the future!"

"You are better, eh!" he continued; "Did not I tell you so? I am hurried out of my life;—the new studio to look after;—things to be moved, and a hundred other matters to think of. Pattingham wants me to get on with his other copy;—brought another *milordo Inglese* this morning. There will be something to be done there, too! Oh! the game's alive, never fear! But I must be off! Per Bacco! it is later than I thought. You see how I am driven. Good-bye, Tina! Get quite well! *A rivederla, Signora Sappi!*"

And so he bustled out, having scarcely permitted poor Tina to utter a word, and leaving her out of breath with scared surprise and nervous excitement. Then came the reaction; and rushing into the little closet that was now as in old times her chamber, she threw herself on her bed in an agony of tears.

The widow Sappi saw that the stale old drama which has had so tremendously long a run, and will continue to be performed daily, nightly, and hourly, till further notice (of a very fundamental kind) shall be given, was proceeding quite according to customary rule.

"Poveretta!" said she to herself, pityingly, "she don't come to see the truth so quick as some do. But it's no use saying anything. Oh me! I wonder where the saint is, or the dozen of saints for that matter, that could get a poor

loving girl to believe them, if they told her o' Monday what she'll have to find out and break her heart over o' Tuesday. Not if the blessed Virgin was to come down herself to speak to her ! ”

As the winter went on, the widow Sappi often wondered how much neglect it would take to open La Beata's eyes to the too evident truth, that all Pippo's feeling with regard to her was summed up in an anxious desire to forget and obliterate every trace of all that had ever passed between them. The experienced widow's observation in such matters had not fallen on a case of such determined hoping against hope, such wilfully blind fidelity, and such unshakeable faith in the creed of its idol-worship. But gradually, as if according to a designedly calculated scale, Pippo's visits became rarer and rarer. Each interval was sure to be longer than the last. Shorter or more unsatisfactory these visits could hardly be than they were from the first. And La Beata, in her long hours of striving to shut her eyes to the truth that was slowly forcing itself upon her, was more than once startled into a momentary conviction that all was indeed over for her, by the thought of her entire ignorance of his affairs and movements. She did not even know where his new studio was. He had always evaded any direct answer to any questions of hers on this point. It was easy for him to do so in those short hurried visits ; for the slightest rebuff sufficed to turn aside her timid questionings. But she could not fail to be struck by the fact that he communicated to her nothing of his interests, fortunes, hopes, fears, or plans. A general joyousness of tone, and vague expressions of exultation, gave her to understand that things were going prosperously with him ; but beyond this she knew nothing. And the immense change in their relationship which such a fact implied,—the ever increasing distance, which seemed to grow of itself and force them farther and farther asunder,—were more efficacious perhaps in killing the last obstinately renascent shoots of hope, than even the negative evidence of his neglect.

There are happily and vigorously constituted organisations which refuse to submit to the weight of permanent sorrow, which *turn off* misery as an oiled surface turns off water, and which grow towards consolation and fresh hopes and joys by a law as sure in its operation as that which bids a plant turn towards the sun. It is a mistake to suppose that such idiosyncrasies are necessarily incapable of strong affections and warm sympathies; still more so to hold that such must needs be shallow and sterile natures. The probabilities are in favour of a diametrically contrary conclusion. Such organisations can feel deeply, and can feel permanently, where feeling can see a possibility of finding issue for itself in hopeful action. But they instinctively reject hopeless suffering. These are fortunate, strong, wise, amiable, useful, eupeptic individuals, whose fathers and forefathers, for many a generation perhaps, led physically and morally healthy lives. The sunny paths of the world are theirs *de jure*, as well as *de facto*; and it is a shallow, unappreciative, and morbid philosophy which would reproach them for walking in them.

But these fortunate strong ones are too apt on their side to do very imperfect justice, and show but scanty sympathy to those less well-balanced natures, in which happiness seems an exotic to be kept alive only during a constant combination of favourable circumstances, and sorrow the indigenous weed, whose roots, always alive in the soil, spring up into florid growth at every opportunity. The sleek and dappled herd full of the pasture will turn their wanton horns against the stricken deer. In this case also a larger sympathy would lead to a more correct appreciation. And it would be seen that many an accusation of false and affected sentimentality is unjust, and many an exhortation to "make an effort,"—the effort in question being nothing more nor less than an attempt to add by taking thought a cubit to the moral stature,—ill-placed and useless.

Natures of exquisite delicacy and infinite loveliness are to be found among these fragile ones whose minds seem

more readily attuned to sorrow than to joy. The crowning virtue of self-sacrifice grows readily in a heart schooled to expect little for its own gratification; and the devotion of passionate love finds a congenial soil in the soul which needs the support of another, and feels that its small share of sunshine can only reach it by reflection from a more self-sustained nature.

Our poor little fragile, clinging, pale Tina—no longer La Beata, for her phase of artist life, and her connection with the world which had so nicknamed her were over for ever—was essentially and to an exceptional degree one of these;—a class of minds by no means to be confounded with that other equally un-self-supporting but far more shallow and less to be tolerated category, which is always craving for promiscuous sympathy, loves to “wipe its eyes on the public,” finds a morbid satisfaction in baring its woes to the gaze of others, and consolation in talking of its sorrows. It is the privilege, and at the same time in a great degree the misfortune of such natures as that of poor Tina that they are self-contained though not self-supporting. It would have been better for her if she could have spoken of the grief that was sapping her life to the kindly sympathising, though imperfectly and unintelligently sympathising widow Sappi. But she could not do this. It was impossible to her to speak, when speech could only have been blaspheming against the idol still enthroned in her heart. Discourse could only have tended to disclose and bring into stronger light the fact that her intelligence and her heart were in contradiction to each other. And as the heart was so strong and the intelligence so weak that the former was supreme tyrant of the will, she shrank from aught that could be suspected of a tendency to take part with the latter.

Her love for the master of her heart was indefeasible. The affection she had given she had no power or will to withdraw. The object of it might become changed, but her devotion could know no change. He might become, or be discovered to be, unworthy of being loved. It was a

misfortune,—the greatest of all conceivable misfortunes,—a misfortune that might kill her life, but could not kill her love. There stood extant to the external senses the form and the individuality, which her imagination had invested with all the attributes that can most deserve a woman's devotion. And the higher faculties of her nature were not sufficiently developed to be capable of undoing that work, and separating the ignoble real of the individual from the noble ideal of her own creation.

Such often is the love of women, and such sometimes, but far more rarely, the love of men. And poets and romancers have vied with each other in throwing a halo of glory and poetry around the unalterable constancy of a love thus indefeasible. And there is something in love itself so lovely,—the manifestation of its power in its intensest form appeals so irresistibly to human sympathy,—that men, and still more women, have been prone to accept such presentments as true delineations of a lofty and admirable beau-ideal.

Yet surely there must be grave and dangerous error in any such estimate. Surely a manifestation of human passion which has furnished forth the subject-matter of more written and acted tragedies than all the other workings of the heart of man put together, and which by the necessity of the case can issue only in the saddest of all tragedies, cannot be admirable; cannot be in accordance with the highest law of our nature; cannot be accepted as a permanent and necessary result of the divinely ordained constitution of man and his destinies. Qualities, dispositions, conduct, passions, which necessarily involve woe and suffering, are surely by that fact alone convicted of inconsistency with that higher and better development of human destinies, to which an improved intelligence of good and evil is conducting mankind. The unalterable love which loves on despite all things is beautiful, but it is not the most beautiful. The love which does not cease when its object ceases to be or to appear deserving of love, partakes more of the lower nature of passion than of the spirituality

of such a union as should make the blessedness of two eternal souls throughout eternity.

All the faculties, all the capabilities, all the passions of our nature are intended and calculated to lead to joy and happiness only, as surely as the fire which can consume, the subtle poison which can sap the life-springs, and the lightning which can blast, duly subjected to man's control, may and do minister to his comfort and advantage. And the preaching addressed to those whose minds are more readily reached by the poet and the novelist than by other preachers, should tell them that all the tragedies and sorrows which love may lead to, are due wholly and solely to love misplaced. They may be told, too, that for the well-placing of it, the requirements of every portion of our complex nature must be duly complied with; that instincts, appetites, and passions are as wisely ordered to equally necessary and benevolent ends, as the more spiritual aspirations of the soul; that neither can be neglected with impunity; that the eye, the fancy, the instinctive preferences, the judgment, the conscience, must be all duly consulted, and all satisfied; that a love so based *aright*, is a love for time and for eternity; and that a love so based *in error* may have to endure awhile the pains and penalties of error, but that it will cease, as soon as the error is discovered, and will not leave hopeless heartwreck and a blasted life behind it.

Our poor little Tina's love, true-hearted, devoted, self-sacrificing, beautiful, piteous as it was, was of a different quality from this. No conductor had been provided for the lightning, and it passed through her life, and left it a blasted wreck. What would you have? Can the results of strength, knowledge, and culture be expected from weakness, ignorance, and neglect? And where are we to look for the author of the mischief? Who was to blame in the matter? Healthy Anglo-Saxon speculation, knowing nothing of "disgrazie," never sees misery and evil, without asking who is to be blamed for it. But the search for the maker of such mischief is apt to lead the inquirer very far

afeld sometimes. The genesis of cause and effect in the moral world is a large and terrible subject. And what analysis can hope to discover all the agencies that have contributed to produce any given phenomenon of character or conduct! Possibly, however, if one were required to put one's finger on the human being who to the best of mortal ken was most responsible for the shortcomings, imperfection, and weakness of poor Tina, one would point perhaps to Lorenzo the Magnificent, or haply to Pope Clement the Seventh. But Lorenzo and Clement had moral ancestors as well as Tina. And maybe it were as well to limit our investigations to the results of conduct, without touching on the point of blame and moral responsibility.

Tina judged no one, blamed no one for the hopeless misery that had fallen on her,—not even herself. Moral speculation was as impossible to her intellect as anger or resentment to her heart. She knew only that all light and hope were gone out from her life. Very slowly as the weeks rolled heavily on, had she learned to admit the idea that she was no longer loved. Hope had died very hard with her. The iron had entered into her soul by a slow process of graving, more prolific of anguish than a thousand deaths by sudden stab.

As the year came to its close, the flickering waning lamp of her hope was going out also. Each one of the rare, hurried visits Pippo had paid her during the weeks that had succeeded her residence with the widow Sappi had been marked by some word dropped carelessly by him in appearance, but in reality carefully calculated to indicate the total and necessary divergence of their lives thenceforward. Since the middle of December, she had not seen him at all.

So the old year died, having done its appointed work, by forwarding the world one little stage on its invisible-goaled *excelsior* progress, despite broken vows and breaking hearts. And the young one started on its course amid festivity and rejoicing, and the grandest resolutions of far

surpassing its predecessor in the portion of that unending journey to be accomplished within its span, and the more valuable certainty of at least inevitably achieving its own ordained task in the matter despite the still re-germinating weed-crop of sorrows, and the fresh hearts to be stifled by them.

It was the evening of the first day of the new year; and all Florence was intensely busy in cramming into one night more festival-keeping, more friendly meetings, more amusement, and more feasting than could be contained in any four-and-twenty hours. The whole city was keeping the universal holiday.

All Florence! The whole city! So the stereotyped phrase goes. The imagination accepts it, and does not care to take note of exceptions, mere spots on the sun of the general picture. "De minimis non curat lex." At such times the stricken deer of the herd hide themselves more solicitously than ever.

A holiday is a very heavy day to joyless hearts. Religion and custom forbad the widow Sappi and her assistant to occupy the hours with their accustomed labour. The materials of their craft had all been carefully gathered and put away. The poor, fireless, brick-floored room was swept and garnished; a fresh supply of oil was poured into the little lamp that hung in front of the old black picture of the Madonna; Tina had knelt in the solitude of her closet before the cherished coloured print of the "Virgin of the Seven Sorrows," which had accompanied her in her migration to Pippo's home, and had been brought back to its old place on her return; she had poured forth all her simple tale of sorrows, and passionate craving, with streaming eyes upraised to the serenely sad face of the picture, and the symbolical poniards planted in her maternal bosom; she had striven, as best she knew, to throw open her soul to the influences and mercies of the Infinite; and the recording angel surely dropped one of those tears which need be so continually streaming from his eyes, on the word *Idolatry*, as he noted the fact upon the record.

Then the two women attended mass in the little neighbouring church, which Tina used to frequent in the old dull and monotonous but comparatively happy days with her mother. The mass, however, did not last very long; and when they returned from it to their dreary room the holiday which "all Florence" was enjoying began to weigh upon them very severely. The regular course for the disposal of the afternoon, according to the fashion of their class, would have been to array themselves in the neat and becoming toilette which most Florentine women manage to possess, even if the acquisition of it cost them the half of their daily pittance of dry bread during many a month of saving, and then to have sallied forth to meet acquaintances in the course of a walk on the *Lungarno*. Or, as often occurs in cases where poverty is so great as to have rendered the acquisition of the garments indispensable for a becoming appearance in the streets absolutely incompatible with the necessity, scarcely recognised as more important, of keeping body and soul together, they might have arranged their hair with all the care and skill of a professional artist, limited their toilette ambition to rendering themselves presentable down to the waist only, and thus have sat at the open window, exposing to public gaze only as much of them as was fit to meet the eye, and content themselves with such modicum of chat as could be enjoyed with neighbours and acquaintances in the street, prevented by the friendly window parapet from seeing that the "*mulier formosa superne*" ended in a ragged or dirty wrapper.

But neither the widow nor her boarder were in a condition to enjoy even this mildest form of dissipation and holiday-making. The malaria produced by the results of the flood had penetrated to the poor widow's joints and muscles, and produced rheumatism, which had caused her much suffering for several days past. And Tina on returning from mass was attacked by violent shivering fits, and felt so unwell that she proposed to profit by the holiday to go to her bed. Partly for company's sake, and partly for

kindness' sake, the widow, with the thin blanket from her own bed thrown over her shoulders and a *scaldino** under her feet, established herself by her guest's bed-side; and so these two kept their holiday-tide of welcome to the beginning year.

At last the weary day wore to its early close; and "at the twenty-four"† the churches rang out the Ave-Maria. They had been sitting in silence for some time past as the shadows deepened around them. Tina heaved a great sigh as the evening call to prayer was rung. She recited devoutly the Latin words of the formula prescribed, in a whispered tone; and then said, "I had been thinking, Marta, for the last ten days, that he might perhaps come on this day, when everybody sees their . . . all those they love. But the day is over! Everything is over!" she added, after a moment's pause; and then again while the good widow was meditating how best to take advantage of the moment to fix in her mind the truth that such was indeed the case, she said, "Should you hear the bell at the door, Marta, sitting here in this room?"

"Sure, I should hear it, my child, and so would you, if any hand were there to pull it. But bless your dear heart, he you are thinking of will never pull that bell again."

Tina made no answer, but turned her poor thin face to the pillow, and her tears flowed fast and silently.

"But, Marta," she said again suddenly, after a while, "suppose he were ill—too ill to come out or write!"

"Poor little thing!" answered La Sappi, sadly, "it is very hard to think that all is over, even when one says it. But what would you have? The world is made so! Men

* A "scaldino," or "warmer," is a little earthenware pot with a small quantity of ignited braise in it, almost universally carried about with them by both men and women of the lower and middle classes of the Florentines in cold weather.

† "The twenty-four" is the common Florentine phrase for the hour of sunset. The hour preceding it is similarly sometimes called "the twenty-three;" but these two phrases are the only remnants still surviving of the old method of counting the first hour after sundown as one o'clock, and so on to twenty-four.

don't love like we do. I knew, when he first came here, how it would be. My good man went to sea and never came back any more. He was drowned. And you must think likewise of him that is gone from you."

The widow meant her words to be words of consolation. But the practice of that moral surgery requires gifts and knowledge which are not at the command of every one. No sorrowing heart was ever comforted by arguments, however lucid, proving that it ought not to feel as it does feel, and drawn from the experience of one feeling differently. Sympathy, not dyspathy, is the only comforter. The beneficent action of one human soul on another may be truly infinite; but for the exercise of such influence it is absolutely necessary that the one soul should be able to come into contact with the other. To dispute the grounds of a sorrow, instead of sharing it, is to raise a barrier between the heart you would comfort and your own, instead of finding a point of contact.

Kindly Marta Sappi's efforts failed, accordingly, to afford any consolation. Tina turned her face again wearily to the pillow; and another silence ensued. After a while she said, "I wish I was quite sure, Marta, that it was for Pippo's good that he should leave me. But I know so little! Do you think that it is likely to be best for him?"

"Well, I suppose if he comes to be a famous painter, as they say, he will be wanting to marry some one who has got money and friends that would be likely to help him, you know," responded the widow, like an experienced and judicious widow as she was.

"And I have neither money nor friends to give him," said Tina, musingly, "that is certain. But it has often seemed to me," she added, after a pause, "that money and friends are not the best of all things to have."

She had not the slightest idea, poor child, that she was plagiarizing from doctors and teachers from Solomon downwards—still less that she was propounding a great moral truth. She was giving with all diffidence the result of her own unaided meditations on her own sorrows.

"All the money and friends in the world," she pursued, "are nothing at all to me in comparison to being loved by him. Why should they be so much more valuable to him than all the love I gave him?"

The problem was propounded with the most perfect simplicity and good faith, as a problem to be solved, if the widow Sappi had the wit to solve it.

"I suppose," said she, after a little consideration, "that these gentlemen have more need of money than we have; and then besides " But on second thoughts the widow deemed it better to suppress the further elucidations of the subject which were in her mind. She considered discreetly that the "strong meat" of bitter worldly wisdom, which her experience had enabled her to collect on this question, might not be adapted to the use of the babe before her, at all events in her present state of mind.

"If I could only be satisfied that Pippo was really better off," resumed Tina, after another long pause, "and if I could but die, *Marta mia*, out of this weary, weary world, I would be content."

"Nay! you are far too young to talk in that way for many a year yet!" rejoined the widow, taking a view of the matter which she meant to be encouraging, but apparently admitting that one who had been in the world half a century might naturally enough be willing to leave it. But perceiving that Tina laid back her head upon the pillow, as she said those last words—that she closed her eyes, and composed her hands and slender figure, as if she were trying to realize to her imagination the perfect repose of the last sleep, the good woman rose from her seat, and after looking down on the pale, worn face for a minute or two, sadly shaking her head, turned and stole quietly to her own bed, in the hope that the stricken heart might obtain the blessing of at least a temporary oblivion.

And so the holiday of New Year's Day was passed by those two women in their solitary home in the Corso, while "all Florence" was in the streets, and the theatres and the ball-rooms welcoming the new year and the first night of

Carnival, with singing, laughing, and dancing; and every now and then the sound of noisy revellers in the street, beneath Tina's windows, swept in fitful gusts over her feverishly sensitive ear, like far-away echoes of a distant world, with which she seemed to have no longer any connection or relationship.

CHAPTER XII.

PATRONAGE.

Pippo meanwhile had been dexterously making the most of that tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on, as we know, to fortune. As his visits to the house in the Corso had gradually slackened and at length finally ceased, they became constantly more numerous to the *cereria* in a street a few yards to the north of it. No word had ever passed between him and the old wax-chandler with reference to his objectionable connection with Nunziatina Leti; but the old man was as perfectly well informed of his separation from her as if every step in the matter had been taken under his own direction. It would have been very difficult for any man, woman, or child in Florence to conceal their comings in or goings out from Laudadio Benincasa, if he had any interest in making himself acquainted with them. If the Romish modern successors of the apostles do not precisely carry out the recommendation to "have *all* things in common," they at least conform to the apostolic rule in the matter of useful information respecting the members of their flocks; and old Laudadio's relations and friendships placed all this joint-stock fund of information at his disposition at need.

The membership of the "Venerable Archconfraternity of the Misericordia" had also been duly effected; and Pippo, the respectable and "right-thinking," though

perfectly irrecognizable under the disguise of his black frock and hood when engaged in any of the acts of mercy peculiar to the brotherhood, yet let his right hand know what his left was doing quite sufficiently to obtain all the credit and consideration due to so respectable a position.

The desirable results, indeed, of such a character as the young artist was now acquiring for himself in a society constituted as that of Florence then was, were apt to meet the fortunate "right-thinker" at every turn in the most unexpected manner. Mr. Patringham had wished Pippo to make for him a sketch of a picture in the Pitti palace, which it was generally very difficult to obtain permission to copy in consequence of the great number of applications for the favour. At the gallery of the Uffizi, indeed, favour had nothing to do with the matter: copyists put their names down on a list for such and such pictures, and waited a greater or less number of years till their turn came. But in the more aristocratic saloons of the Pitti, though the collection of pictures is equally national property, a judicious word discreetly whispered by certain lips into certain ears rarely failed to obtain the desired privilege for applicants of the "right-thinking" class. And Pippo thus found himself able to undertake at once for Mr. Patringham a commission which the majority of his competitors would not have been able to execute. Such are the rewards of respectability.

Mr. Patringham rarely failed, every time he had occasion to speak with Pippo, to ask kindly after his wife's health, to the great annoyance of that thoroughly reformed character. He always replied to these unwelcome inquiries by a melancholy shake of the head and a few words intended to give the Englishman to understand that there was little hope of her recovery, and that the less that was said on so painful a subject the better.

Old Laudadio, who was, as has been seen, better informed, was also more discreet. No unpleasant reference to a past state of things ever marred the pleasant visits to the sanctum behind the *cereria*. But there were others

who could not be kept in ignorance of the real facts of the case, as was Mr. Pattingham, and who were not gifted with the judicious discretion of Signor Benincasa. There was our old acquaintance Tito Fanetti, for instance, and many others of the artist guild, whose lax morality had in no wise been scandalised by the irregular nature of Pippo's alliance with La Beata, but who were not at all disposed to look with tolerance on the desertion of her. Upon one occasion, when Tito had remonstrated with his friend on the subject, Pippo had attempted to point out to him the true orthodox view of the subject, and to show him how clearly it was his bounden duty to put an end to the sin and scandal of which he repented having been guilty. But his endeavours in this line called forth so strong an expression of that same ribald contempt for ecclesiastical doctrines and sanctions, of which it may be remembered Tito was guilty on a former occasion, that Pippo felt that it would be a casting of pearls before swine to speak again to him or such as he on the subject. In fact, the fraternity of artists at Florence were far from being a "right-thinking" class as a body, and were accordingly by no means regarded favourably in the high places of either church or state. Pippo's new profession of faith, therefore, and new friendships and associations, were considered by his former companions as indicating a desertion to the Philistines and an apostacy, which placed a social gulf between him and them. All this, however, was but a recommendation the more to the favourable consideration of the social camp he had resolved on joining. It served to mark him more unmistakably as one of their own, and to justify the selection of him as the recipient of favours reserved for warranted sound "right-thinkers."

But one of the consequences of the ill favour in the eyes of his old comrades, which Pippo's recent conduct and habits had incurred, was to make his accustomed evening haunts at the cafés frequented by them disagreeable to him. And the natural result was that his visits to the *cereria* became more and more frequent. There he was always

received with smiles of welcome and dismissed with invitations to return; and the unfailing cordiality of both the father and daughter convinced him that the great prize of Beppina's hand was assuredly within his reach.

A small alteration in the old wax-chandler's household, too, which took place soon after the commencement of Carnival, seemed to him, in all probability rightly, to have been made with the express view of facilitating his visits. A sister of Signor Laudadio, the wife of a rich *fattore* * in the Casentino, † came to pass the Carnival at Florence in her brother's house. By this arrangement the old trader was dispensed from any necessity of breaking his usual habits for the sake of receiving his young protégé. The Signora Assunta Marradi made an unexceptionable chaperon for her niece; and the two ladies were always sure to be found at home in the large sitting-room looking into the garden behind the shop.

La Signora Assunta was some years older than her brother Laudadio, but was full as many his junior in health and vigour. The brisk, active little old woman was as ruddy as he was yellow; equally ignorant and uneducated; but supplying the narrow world-wisdom which he had picked up in the course of his city life by a fair share of that somewhat more genial, rustic shrewdness, not altogether unseasoned by a dash of humour, which is so frequently found among the Tuscan rural population. A stranger to the varieties of Tuscan life and manner would have been puzzled to guess the social position and standing of La Signora Assunta Marradi. The confusion in her costume of the very evident tokens of something more than easy circumstances with the forms of dress of a peasant; and still more the mixture in her manner of humble

* Agent. The managers of the estates of the larger Tuscan proprietors, who very frequently may be observed to become rich as the ignorant city-living landlord gets poorer, are so called. The position of these men is more that of an Irish estate agent than of an English bailiff.

† The name of the upper valley of the Arno.

deference when speaking to those whom she considered as city-nurtured gentlemen, with the short, sharp air of one used to authority which she adopted towards inferiors, would have thrown him out. Her dress, on a visit to the capital, for instance, would have consisted of a black silk gown of the richest quality, with a small scarlet handkerchief pinned across her bosom, a huge necklace of six strings of pearls, and a broad-leafed, low-crowned, black felt hat, if Beppina had not by dint of earnest entreaty induced her in some degree to modify it. At home in the Casentino she could never have been caught out of her bed without this last article of costume; and very rarely without a distaff charged with flax attached to her waist, which her fingers were ceaselessly spinning into thread to be made into linen sheets and table-cloths, destined to increase the store, already sufficient for many generations of her descendants, laid up in the walnut-wood chests and presses, which were the palladium of her household. In Florence, Beppina had with some difficulty succeeded in substituting for the time-honoured distaff the genteeler industry of the knitting-needle.

Now and then Signor Marradi himself, who with his broad ruddy face, and broader shoulders, his stout calves cased in stout woollen hose, his broad-leafed hat, and his huge metal-buttoned scarlet waistcoat, and knee-breeches, might have passed for an English farmer of the old school, had he not worn little gold rings in his ears, would come up to Florence for a day to visit his brother-in-law, bringing with him a present of game, or a ham fed on the acorns of the Casentino woods. Upon such occasions Pippo's evening visit was changed into an invitation to dinner, and the party would be completed by some one of Signor Laudadio's many reverend friends.

Beppina's sole talent and accomplishment was singing, together with a sufficient knowledge of the piano to enable her to accompany herself very tolerably in the popular songs and "stornelli," with which every Tuscan girl's memory is stocked, and very intolerably in the grand

operatic pieces, which she preferred to attempt. And this gift of La Beppina did a twofold service during those evening visits of Pippo's, which from being frequent at the beginning of Carnival had become almost nightly towards its close. Not only was her singing agreeable enough, when confined to the popular music, which the genius of Gordigiani has made familiar to all Europe, as her aunt insisted it should be, when she was to hear it; but it stood in the place of talking, which was a truly inappreciable advantage to two persons in the position of herself and Signor Pippo, who had as nearly as possible nothing to say to each other. Beppina felt a very genuine admiration for Pippo's fine eyes, well-formed person, and handsome black beard; but it would not have been proper to state as much even once; and far less was it possible to fill the long hours with perpetual repetitions of the ingenuous protestation of Lord Bateman's fair Sophia, "I wish 'gnor Pippo as you vas mine," even though that unsophisticated child of Nature did repeat the formula with "every health she drank unto him." Beppina said as much very intelligibly with her pretty black eyes, "every song she sang unto him," but she could not do more. Pippo, on the other hand, was most seriously intent on making himself master of the accumulated profits of the *cereria* by marrying the heiress thereof. But neither could these sentiments be openly declared. So the songs supplied everything that was wanting to their intercourse. Not only was it easy by due interchange of glances to appropriate to themselves the sentiments expressed; but the performance afforded a ground for at least some little intervening small talk, in which Pippo could without too painful an effort of imagination and invention find something suggested by the words that could be turned into an insinuation of his devoted affection and eager hopes.

Then, a little later, when Carnival was over, they were much assisted by a peculiar Tuscan lenten institution, which seems to have been invented expressly for such purposes. This is the merry game of "verde," which,

according to ancient custom, is played in this wise. At the beginning of Lent a gentleman offers a lady a sprig of box, inviting her to divide it with him. If she consents to do so, the act of breaking it engages her to a game of "verde," with the proposer, to last during the forty days of Lent. By the rule of the game each party is bound to have about them, and to produce on every demand of their partner in the play, a sprig of box, green and in good condition. Failure to do so subjects them either to the forfeiture of some previously determined gage, or to the payment of whatever forfeit the winning party may demand in the exercise of his or her discretion. And this latter more tremendous mode of playing the game is generally preferred, as may be easily imagined, by most of those, who have still their all to lose or to win. Of course the gist of the fun is to demand the production of the green sprig, the "verde," at the most unlikely and unexpected times and occasions possible; and every conceivable stratagem for traitorously depriving the adversary of his or her talisman, such as pocket picking and corruption of valets and abigails, is all fair. All this too, as may likewise be readily understood, is admirably adapted to forward the objects of aspiring youths and smitten damsels;—some of whom would seem to consider the real interest of the game to consist in never being found provided with their "verde;" while few perhaps are sufficiently cruel or cautious to reach Easter without having to pay forfeit in some shape or other.

So, Beppina and Pippo played at "verde" together;—on very unequal terms, as Pippo declared; inasmuch as there was plenty of box in the garden behind the *cereria* close to the sitting-room windows, and thus always at hand not only to supply her with daily fresh sprigs, but also to suggest the necessity of arming herself with them. Yet it generally happened, that on leaving the house to attend mass, Beppina's mind was, as at such a time was but right and proper, so much occupied by other thoughts, that she totally forgot all about her "verde." Pippo, of course, understood his part too well to fail either in being duly

seen at mass in the first place, or in being ready at the church door to touch the tips of Beppina's fingers with holy water as she went out in the next place, or in asking for her "verde," as he did so, and receiving with due triumph her tittering confession of having forgotten all about such nonsense in the third place, or lastly in exacting the forfeit he judged it most expedient to impose the same evening, while Aunt Assunta sat by and saw fair play.

Meantime, while Pippo's easy wooing was progressing thus satisfactorily, old Laudadio had not forgotten his project respecting the picture of Saint Filomena, nor neglected putting the right wheels in action for the attainment of the end in view. And Pippo rightly judged that the cordiality of his old friend, and the complacency with which he looked on the evident flirtation between him and Beppina, might be taken as a fair measure of the goodness of his hopes of success in obtaining that important object.

At length one day towards the end of Carnival, just as Pippo had returned from the Pitti, where he was busy in finishing his third commission for Mr. Patringham, to his new studio at San Barnaba,* he was agreeably surprised by a visit from his father-in-law *in posse*. He knew, before he opened the door, whose stick it was that was so vigorously battering it; for he had heard the well-known thump on every step as the old man hobbled up the stairs; and his heart jumped into his throat with the sudden conviction that it must be something of importance which had brought the old gentleman so far out of his usual beat. Time had been when Pippo might have required a few moments to make all right in his studio for the reception of a guest of such a description. But everything there now was in perfect keeping with the new character of the tenant. He had only to cast a momentary glance towards the picture of the Madonna on the wall to see that the lamp beneath it was duly burning, before hastening to admit his visitor.

* A suppressed convent, now occupied by a numerous colony of painters and sculptors.

"Very busy, eh!" said the old man, entering and taking a seat on the old green silk sofa of our acquaintance; "capital room you have got here, indeed! but I can't say much for your staircase. And all the fine gentlemen and the English ladies climb these stairs to get at you, do they? In that case a poor Florentine tradesman ought not to grumble, I suppose. I dare say you are expecting somebody now, and I shall only be in the way of more profitable visitors."

Of course, Pippo protested that Signor Laudadio Benincasa was the most welcome and most honoured of all possible visitors.

"*Che! Che!*" * What would an old wax-chandler have to do in an artist's studio;—an artist who receives English visitors, and paints commissions for English *milordi*? Eh, Signor Pippo!"

"Yes! English *milordi*!" replied Pippo. "We poor devils of artists are obliged to work for any who will give us work to do; and the English money is very good money. But there might be better things to do than paint pictures for heretics, that is certain. Don't you think so, Signor Laudadio?"

"Such as a votive picture, commissioned in the highest quarter,—mark, I say the very highest,—well paid, and sure to set all Florence talking. That is what I call something like patronage of the fine arts! But then I am only an old-fashioned tradesman."

"And where, I should like to know," quoth Pippo sententiously, "would have been the great Tuscan school of painting, and the higher walks of art all over the world for that matter, had it not been for old-fashioned Florentine tradesmen of your sort, Signor Laudadio?"

"Ay! ay! You may say that, my boy. Our fathers did great things. But, bah! we live in very different times. We have fallen on degenerate days, Signor Pippo!"

* "What! what!" an ever-recurring exclamation in every Tuscan mouth.

Still it may be that the old spirit is not quite all dead yet!" said the old man as he got up and stumped across the room, fancying himself a Strozzi, or a Pitti, or an Albizzi, dispensing the magnificent patronage which made the summer time of the *renaissance*, and feeling that if only his rusty black coat, knee-breeches, and stockings could be changed for a flowing robe and scarlet hood, he could enact the part to the life. "Something there may be to be had by an artist of reputable character, Signor Pippo, of the right sort, you understand me, even yet."

Pippo felt sure now that the old man brought good news of the Santa Filomena project; and thinking that he had administered sufficient flattery to merit the disclosure of it, he remarked:—

"No doubt of it, my dear friend! And if one . . . thoroughly of the right sort, as you say, were fortunate enough to have a patron thoroughly of the right sort,—a genuine descendant of those old-fashioned Florentine traders we spoke of,—he might perhaps find the means of making something of a reputation that would reflect honour on his friends. I was in hopes, to say the truth, that you had come to speak of the portrait of Santa Filomena. I can take no interest in these things," he added, pointing to the unfinished picture on his easel, "since you fired my ambition by holding out a hope of that kind."

"I believe you, my boy! And old Laudadio is not the man to hold out expectations that mean nothing, nor to stretch out his arm so far that he does not know exactly where his hand is. And you knew that, eh? Yes! I did come to speak about the Santa Filomena. Now look here, and attend to what I am going to say. Take this address:—'The Most Rev. Don Marcantonio Capucci, Canon of San Lorenzo, and private Chaplain' but never mind all that. Basta! You remember seeing a reverend gentleman one day with me in my little counting-house at the *cereria*. That was he. But you are not to say a word of having seen him before, nor to mention me, you

understand! You go to that address, send in your name, and then speak when you are spoken to, and not before. Do you mark me?"

"Every word, my dear sir! I shall obey you scrupulously. When do you think I had better wait on his reverence?" said Pippo, in a great state of excitement.

"Now directly; or pretty nearly directly," said the other, looking at his watch; "you are to be there at five. It is nearly half-past four now. And look you, friend Pippo, there are two other things to be mentioned. First, say not a word to any body about the matter. It is of no use to set people talking before hand. Let them talk when the picture is painted, eh! Pippo. And secondly, mind, if you are lucky enough to get this commission, all these little matters must stand over, you understand. The English milordi must wait. *Per Bacco!* They will be only too glad to have a bit of your canvas. The Santa Filomena will have to be painted out of hand; and you must give yourself to it entirely."

"Of course, of course! You may depend on it, I shall think of nothing else," said Pippo.

"And now, my boy, I wish you good luck, and good bye," said the old man, turning to go. "And Pippo," he added, as he opened the door of the studio, "you may as well come to the *cereria* in the evening, and tell us all about it. Beppina will be anxious to hear your news. She takes a great interest in matters of art, Beppina does."

"*Che! diamine!** Do you think I should fail to do so?" returned Pippo. And so they parted; the artist remaining behind only to shut up his studio, and don his best coat, before starting for San Lorenzo.

It will not be necessary for us to follow Signor Pippo Lonari in his visit to the cloister of San Lorenzo, or to detail the particulars of his interview with the reverend

* A Tuscan expletive difficult to render. The dictionaries give, "What the deuce!" but that does not give the sense. It is always used as assenting to a proposition, with surprise that the contrary should be deemed possible.

Canon Marcantonio Capucci. Of course, he was received with the most courteous politeness; but so he would have been had the business in hand been to condemn him to the stake. Of course, in opening to him the subject of the commission to be entrusted to him, the circumstances set forth as having attracted the favourable notice of the "exalted lady" for whom the picture was to be painted, were pure inventions; and of course, such an individual as the wealthy wax-chandler was never alluded to by either party. Of course, each knew that the other was aware that every word uttered by either of them was all falsehood and pretence, and each knew that the other knew that he knew it. But this did not in any degree diminish the satisfaction and advantage derived from treating the matter with due regard to appearances and proprieties. The upshot of the whole was, that Pippo was commissioned to paint a full length picture of Santa Filomena, to be carried in a procession that was to take place in the Saint's honour; and he was particularly warned that the work must be ready by the coming Easter.

"I can, if you should wish it," said the smart and courteous ecclesiastic in conclusion, "furnish you with many particulars of the Saint's life and miracles. But, perhaps, as only a general representation is contemplated, you will prefer being left to the inspirations of your own genius. I believe, indeed, I could refer you to an ancient portraiture of the Saint; but," he added, with that peculiar smile which Roman Catholic ecclesiastics of the higher class are apt to assume when they wish to make themselves agreeable to educated laymen, in speaking of Church matters, and which seems to imply a complimentary confidential understanding that the individual addressed is not the dupe of all that sort of thing, and an admission of his right to share the esoteric views of such matters, "it is very probable that you may produce us something more to the purpose if not tied down to a servile copying of the authentic features—something more attractive; more calculated to appeal to the heart, you understand. Female

beauty will always exercise an immense influence; it is our duty to hallow it to its best uses, Signor Lonari."

"I shall endeavour to prove that I have appreciated the value of your reverence's remarks," said Pippo, bowing lowly.

"I have no doubt that we shall have reason to think ourselves fortunate in having entrusted the work to such able hands. Very possibly I may indulge myself with a look at the picture as it progresses, with your permission. And, by-the-bye," he added, as he courteously bowed the artist to the door, "you had better leave me the address of your studio."

"Let those laugh who win," said Pippo to himself, as he passed by a dining-house, frequented by young artists, where he used formerly to dine, but which his present estimation in the guild had made it more agreeable for him to shun. "Let those laugh who win," he said, as he went off to a solitary dinner, "the day will come when any one of them will be only too glad of an invitation to dine at my table."

About a couple of hours later he found Beppina and her aunt evidently expecting him in the parlour behind the *cereria*.

"Well," cried Beppina, as he entered, "is it settled? Tell us all about it! What did his reverence say?"

"I'll begin by telling you what your father said, Signora Beppina," returned Pippo, laughingly. "He specially charged me to say nothing about the matter to which you are probably alluding to anybody."

"Bah! I am nobody, and Aunt Assunta is discretion itself. Do you think papa has any secrets from me? He will be here himself directly, and will want to hear all about it; but I don't mean to wait till then. Is the picture ordered?"

"The picture is ordered, Signora Beppina. It is to be finished by Easter. His reverence the canon was exceedingly gracious: and truly I owe very many thanks to your good father."

"Ah! oh yes, to my father!" cried Beppina with a pout, and a half-laughing half-reproachful glance at Pippo, which said plainly enough that she thought some of the gratitude was due to her father's daughter.

Pippo placed his hand on his heart, and gave her a look meant to speak volumes of gratitude and tenderness, followed by an inquiring glance towards the old lady, as if to ask how much he might say in her presence.

Beppina answered his telegraph by saying, "Now, is it not hard, Aunt Assunta, that when I have been at papa day and night for weeks past to make him say a word for this gentleman here, for the sake of old times—for we were playmates together as children, you know—he should keep all his thanks for papa!"

"Thanks are mostly a payment on account to begin a new bill upon," said the old lady, with the caustic shrewdness so common among the Tuscan peasantry. "Signor Pippo, no doubt, knows where there's more to come from."

Beppina gave him a laughing look, as much as to say that she did not see that that view of the case ought to exclude her from participating in his gratitude; but she only said, "Well now, why don't you speak? Do tell us what was said, and all about it."

"Well, Signora Beppina, I think the principal directions given me were, that I must take care to do justice to the original. Santa Filomena was, it seems, wonderfully beautiful."

"Oh, indeed, that's charming. But I think all the saints must have been beautiful, if we are to go by the pictures you painters make of them. And I suppose all the beautiful women are saints. Well-a-day!"

"I have seen very beautiful girls who were not altogether saints, Signora Beppina," said Pippo.

"But you don't say a word of the main question, Signor Pippo," put in Aunt Assunta, "how much are you to have for the picture?"

"Why, the fact is," answered he, "that the Canon did

not say a word about price, and I judged that it was wiser for me not to touch on that point."

And then Signor Laudadio came limping in, very exultant, and full of congratulations. Pippo observed that he did not ask any questions, but seemed either to know all about the matter already, or else to take the result for granted.

"But he did not even ask about the price," persisted the old lady.

"The price! the price! of course he did not. I should hope not. Don't you fear about the price, my boy. We don't do things in that way, Sister Assunta," said the old gentleman, very magnificently.

"I was sure you would think I did right, sir," said Pippo, "in not touching upon that point. One drives a bargain with heretic foreigners, but not with such patrons as you and your friends."

"I, my dear boy! I is no patronage of mine," said old Laudadio, with a very unsuccessful imitation of humility. "Times have been, indeed," he went on, "as we were saying to-day, when art was beholden to the patronage of simple tradesmen of Florence; and I have been thinking that if all goes well, hereafter After all, these canvas pictures are small matters. Fresco is the real artist's triumph. What should you say to a fresco on the wall of the *loggia* here looking on the garden, eh, Signor Pippo? And I have the subject in my head too."

The "things going well," to which old Laudadio's scheme of patronage was subordinated, meant in his mind Pippo's marriage with his daughter, which he had resolved should depend on the successful issue of the *Filomena* picture. And it had occurred to him, when Pippo's flattery had fired him with the notion of playing the *Mecænas* on the model of the old merchant-princes of Florence, that one of the purposes to which an artist son-in-law might be put, would be to get an immortality out of him gratis. And this was the genesis of the scheme for the fresco. Pippo guessed all this with very considerable accuracy; and was

well pleased with the favourable augury to be drawn from it for the realisation of his hopes.

Fresco, he declared, had always been the great object of his ambition. The wall of the *loggia* afforded an admirable opportunity in all respects,—one that would link the artist's name, too, with the memory Signor Laudadio Benincasa would leave to many a generation after him. He was all impatience to learn the proposed subject.

“Oh! I was thinking of a miraculous interposition of the Virgin that occurred in the *cereria* in my father's time,” said the old man, as quietly as if he had spoken of any ordinary accident. “A large boiling of wax caught fire one day but we will talk of that hereafter. Now you have the picture to paint for her roy for his reverence Canon Capucci, I would say; and you must work hard and do your best; and, above all, be ready in time.”

And so they separated; and Pippo went home in a very happy mood, feeling quite sure that his greatness was a-ripening.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PORTRAIT OF SANTA FILOMENA.

THE judicious hints which the most reverend Canon Capucci had bestowed upon Pippo as to the nature of the picture expected from him, had not been cast on barren ground. The seminary-educated young artist understood the matter *à demi mot*. He comprehended perfectly well the mixture of earthly loveliness with seraphic expression, which the priesthood of Rome are so fond of using as a means of stimulating the devotion of the æsthetic and beauty-loving, but little spiritual-minded natures of their southern flocks. And he was earnestly bent on doing his

utmost to secure a brilliant success on so important an occasion. To paint a beautiful and attractive portrait of a female face and figure was not a very difficult task; and a very liberal allowance of easily delineated ordinary flesh-and-blood charms was not only permissible but imperative for the purpose in hand. But, after all, a saint is a saint, and must, to answer the object of her portraiture, be made to look like a saint; there must be the true expression. Nor will the mere maudlin look of half-meretricious sentimentality, which suffices for the beau-idéal of French religious art, content the more artistically trained, and in truth, higher-toned natures of an Italian, especially of a Florentine, public.

All this Pippo knew; and his meditations on the subject during the night after he had received the order led him to the conclusion that the very thing which he needed was such a model as he had once possessed, and had cast away from him. Yes! that would be the thing! Could he but have that well-remembered face, with its purity of soul shining through every feature; its sorrow-chastened look of mild resignation; its gentle, loving eyes to paint from, he felt sure he could produce a very telling saint. Pippo understood little, and reasoned to himself less of purity of soul and sorrow-chastened expression, as may be imagined. But his painter's eye told him that that was the thing he needed. Yes! there was no doubt about it. If he could but manage to have La Beata once more for a model his Santa Filomena would assuredly be a success; and on that success everything depended,—his future reputation,—Laudadio's patronage,—his marriage! For he had little doubt that this was to be one of the rewards of it.

But there were difficulties in the way of attaining this important object. La Beata! pooh! she would only be too glad, poor girl; there was no danger of any opposition on her part. Pippo could not pretend to himself to feel any doubt that the very slightest intimation of a wish from him would be as absolute a law to the clinging heart he had dismissed as it had ever been.

But there were other considerations. It was not pleasant, he could not help feeling, to go back after his long and utter neglect with a request which proved but too clearly that, but for his need of her, he would never have come at all. This, however, involved merely an unpleasant sensation to himself, which of course it was his duty to get over. It would be absurd to let any cowardice on the point interfere with such important interests. But, on the other hand, was it prudent to run the risk of undoing what had been so well and successfully done in the matter of that unfortunate connection? When he had managed in so masterly a manner to transfer La Beata from his home to her old one she had been utterly taken by surprise; and had never dreamed that the separation was to be a permanent one. Yet what a lamentation and a piece of work she had made! *Now* if he were to renew anything like an intimate relationship with her, would she not at once fancy that all was to return to its former footing? and when she found that nothing of the kind was intended, would she not resist being again summarily dropped in a manner that might prove embarrassing?

But still these were not the worst difficulties in the way. How was it possible, under the circumstances, for him to have her in daily attendance at his studio without giving rise to all sorts of injurious reports? Would it not be certainly said and supposed that they were on the same terms together as formerly? Might it not be difficult to persuade even old Laudadio that such was not the case? Might not the scandal which would be sure to arise be injurious to him with his new ecclesiastical patrons? And then that troublesome Pattingham; he was always coming to the studio to see how his picture was getting on. What a pretty kettle of fish there would be if he were to find La Beata there some day!

In short, the risks of all sorts, inseparable from bringing her to his studio, seemed altogether too great to be ventured on. And yet his imagination was full of the picture he felt sure he could paint, if he had but La Beata to paint from.

At last, after much debate with himself, he decided that the only feasible plan was to get the requisite sittings at the house in the Corso. Many, though not quite all the difficulties in the way, might be thus got over. La Beata would neither be led to suppose that she was to return to her former position, nor would she have any opportunity of giving him trouble when the time came for again getting rid of her. He would simply have to absent himself as before as soon as his object should be accomplished. Then although it was almost impossible that he should have her daily at his studio without attention being drawn to the circumstance, it was far more easy for him to steal unobserved to the obscure dwelling of the widow Sappi.

Having decided on this, Pippo made up his mind that the rather unpleasant visit to La Beata, necessary for the arrangement of this plan, must be made the next morning. His easel, canvas, &c., could then be carried in the dark of the following evening to the widow Sappi's room, and he could get to work at once the next day; for the time which had been allowed him for the execution of the work was of the shortest, and it behoved him to lose as little as possible of it. And having arranged these plans in his mind, the rising artist sought, and quickly found, "that calm and dreamless rest which waits upon a good"—digestion.

The next morning, very shortly after daybreak, Pippo was at the widow Sappi's door.

Things had not changed for the better in the dreary and melancholy little household, since that sad new year's evening, now some two months since. The Carnival gaieties were not without their effect even there. They made work in the widow's line abundant. But the two poor women were less able than they had been to execute it. The widow was much troubled with her rheumatism, and since that new year's day Tina's health had been far feebler than before. She had a constant low fever hanging about her. There was an ominous blush of colour in the middle of her cheeks, always formerly so entirely pale. She could get no refreshing sleep. And though these

symptoms were not urgent enough to prevent her from attempting to go through her daily task of toil, she felt from morning to evening so utterly weary and weak, that the day's labour no longer produced the same result as formerly.

Her health was mined, too, by that unhealthiest of all moral conditions, a genuine weariness of life. There are bodily constitutions, which resist for many long weary years all hints from the will, to the effect that it were better for them to break up and dissolve partnership with the spirit anxious to be released from them. But those frailer organisations, in which the slender and fine-run framework is hung upon the delicate and highly-tempered mainspring of a too sensitive nervous system, need the sunshine of happiness and the stimulus of hope to live at all. Drawing their principle of life in a greater degree from the spiritual, and in a less degree from the material portions of our nature, such lives are readily terminated by a refusal on the part of the volition to carry them on.

And our hapless Tina had, in truth, reached that degree of mental malady. Each morning called her to the weary work of filling up amid suffering of body and mind the monotonous round of slow rolling hours, with painful toil for the sole purpose of finding the means to prolong a life, far worse, as it seemed to her, than valueless. Oh! that she could leave it all,—the bitter, bitter musings;—the craving, yearning, not-to-be-killed desire for the love she had lost;—the bodily pains;—the never ending unprogressing journey from morn to eve, and from evening to morning again! Oh! that she could be set free of it all, and go away to be where her mother had gone!

“Mother! mother! Pray for me to the loving mother of God to take me to be with her and with you! For I am all alone here, where no one loves me; and I am miserable and very, very weary! Oh, Holy Virgin mother, leave me not all alone in this dreary wilderness with none to pity me and none to love me!”

Nightly prayers such as these, so constant and so fervent,

were, however blindly breathed, sure to conduce towards their own accomplishment. And by the end of Carnival, when Pippo came early in the raw spring morning on the errand we wot of, La Beata, just risen from her night's unrest to go through the toil and petty cares of yet one more dreary day, had become very visibly changed from what she had been, when last Pippo had seen her, some ten weeks previously.

To the eye of a physician, or to the instinctively sharpened insight of affection, the alteration would have appeared ominous and sad enough. The first would have plainly discerned the tokens of incipient organic malady. The second would hardly have failed to divine grounds for anxiety in the perfidious colouring of the cheek, the nervous restlessness combined with languid atony of the bearing, and the febrile lustre of the eye. To the eye of an artist in search of a model for the special purpose Pippo had in view, the change observable in her could hardly have appeared otherwise than a favourable one. That insidious and hateful hectic, which suffused the clear cold white of the centre of the cheek with the hue of the blush-rose, was in itself, to unknowing or uncaring eyes, exquisitely beautiful. If the cheeks were somewhat too sunken to be compatible with even saintly beauty, a touch of the brush would easily remedy that. But the expression was the treasure! worth anything! as Pippo said to himself on his walk back to his studio after the first sitting. The infinite melancholy of that gentle smile, sadder than tears, which betrayed, as she sat before the easel discharging the old function of her happier days, the unreasoning and instinct-like gratification she could not help feeling from the mere fact of his presence, though she drew from it no slightest ray of hope for the future,—that smile was invaluable. The large eyes, with their deep liquid fever-fed brilliance, appeared to have usurped a larger share than ever of the small delicate face. And the strange half-dreamy, half-wistful outlook from them, which seemed to seek its object in some far, far-away distance, and which

was the expression of that longing desire of the broken spirit to fly away and be at peace,—all this was, as the intelligent artist confessed to himself, “the very thing.”

She derived from this visit, it has been observed, no hope that mercy had been extended to her at the eleventh hour, and that her sentence was to be reversed. She had none such, as she sat to do his behest before the easel. It is true, that on his unexpected entrance into the room for a few moments,—a very short space of time, though long enough for the quickly succeeding revulsion to be exquisitely painful,—she had imagined that all the interval of misery and despair since her departure from the *Via dell' Amore* was to be blotted out like a baleful dream; that it had all been some huge mistake; and that everything had suddenly come right again. But Pippo had come there with the distinctly formed intention of “showing every kindness to the poor girl, which was possible under the circumstances,” and he considerably took care to disabuse her of so untoward an error as quickly as possible.

She would probably have recognised his footfall on the stair had she not been at the moment in her own little closet at the back of the house. She was just entering the living and working-room by the door at the back of it, which communicated with her sleeping-room, when he, having been admitted by the widow, came in by the door opening on the passage. The shock was overwhelming; and at first seemed well nigh to have done the kindly office of releasing her.

“Pippo!” she shrieked, throwing out both arms wildly towards him. But her limbs refused to second the impulse. She was not able to cross the small floor to the spot where he stood; and had not Marta Sappi quickly drawn a chair and placed her in it, she would have fallen. She did not, however, altogether lose her consciousness; for though the eyes were closed, and the head drooped on the shoulder, the two arms remained outstretched towards him. After

a minute or two her chest heaved convulsively with a deep-drawn breath; she opened her eyes, and still holding out the poor thin longing arms—

“At last, Pippo, my love! always my own love!—at last!” she cried.

The respectable and prudent artist was, it must be admitted, somewhat disconcerted at this greeting. He had prepared himself for reproaches, and for the annoyance of a few feminine tears. But that all he flattered himself he had achieved by his prudent forethought and care, all the results of the systematic and judiciously graduated neglect of months, should be thus utterly ignored, was embarrassing. Was she absolutely impervious to the teaching of facts? Had she not even yet reached the comprehension that it was impossible that their youthful and sadly reprehensible folly should be persisted in? Was there ever so obstinately or so stupidly unteachable a woman! He paused for a moment to consider the best mode of meeting this strange line of conduct, and decided, with much presence of mind, that it would be useless to attempt to reply to such tirades, and that if she would persist in following out her view of their relative position, the only plan for him was firmly and consistently to act up to his own conception of the matter, and, as the phrase goes, *live down* her unreasonableness.

So he said, as he advanced towards her, “Yes, Tina, here I am at last, for a purpose. I will tell you presently, when you have got over your surprise at seeing me. Give us your hand, for the sake of old times, eh?”

It was enough. The living down process had been very quickly and thoroughly accomplished. Her head fell on her bosom, and all her body seemed to collapse and shrink. He took her passive, idly-hanging hand in his, and then she looked up dry-eyed; but the strange wistful glance did not so much rest on him as pass over and beyond him, as if seeking something far away. And her lips moved, but gave out no sound.

Then bringing back her eyes to his face, she said, quietly

and slowly, "Still I am glad to see you, Pippo; very glad to see your face yet once again."

"*Che! che!* once again!" returned he, much reassured by the turn the matter had taken; "we shall have many a talk over these old times when we are both old greyheads. Besides, if you are kind enough, as I think you will be, Tina, to do me the favour I am come to ask of you, we shall have to meet every day for some weeks to come."

"A favour, Pippo! I! And we are to meet every day? but always like this. That will be hard, Pippo! and yet"

"You won't refuse me, Tina! It ~~is~~ a matter of importance to me," said he, supposing she was doubting whether she should consent or not.

"Refuse, Pippo! I! Why, am I not your own, Pippo? always your own Tina, to do what you will with? Nothing can change that!"

"Well but, Tina, now; let us talk reasonably. What I want of you is this: I have a commission for an important picture—a portrait of Santa Filomena. It must be completed by Easter, and there is no time to be lost. Now in all Florence there is nobody would be so good a model for a Santa Filomena as yourself. I am sure I shall make a good thing of it if you will help me."

"When must I come to the studio, Pippo?"

"Well, I have been thinking about that, Tina, and I have considered that it will be much less trouble to you if I take the sittings here, that is, always, if La Signora Sappi will permit me to make use of her room."

The widow Sappi's notions of morality were not of a delicate or exacting kind, but she did not just then feel kindly towards the painter. That such loves as those of poor Tina and Pippo Lonari should come to a conclusion at the pleasure and convenience of the stronger party, to the infinite ruin and heart-break of the weaker, was an incident too much within her experience of the world and its ways, too much a matter of course, for her moral indignation to be much moved by it. But she had been painfully

shocked by the violence of the contrast between the two hearts as exhibited in the scene which had been enacted before her. "Men will be men to the end of the chapter," as she expressed it to a gossip of hers afterwards; "but I felt as if I could have scratched his handsome eyes out to see him take it so coolly, and she a-pouring out her heart's blood before his eyes for love of him!"

But she only said, in reply to Pippo's words, "Anything, signor, for the convenience or pleasure of *la poveretta*. I am sure it's little enough that she is able or fit to do, though it is not the will that is wanting, poor dear!"

"Well, then, we'll arrange it so," returned Pippo. "I will send my easel and things here this evening, and tomorrow morning, Tina, we will have our first sitting. Of course," he added, after a little pause, "I shall not let the time you give me be a loss to you, Tina. That would not be fair to La Signora Sappi, you know. I shall make a point of paying your sittings at the usual price, you know."

She raised her eyes to his with an expression of infinite suffering, while the hectic blush on her cheek spread itself over her pale brow. But not even this last blow could stir her to resentment. She only said—

"Not that, Pippo! that must not be. I have told you that I am all yours and only yours. You cannot pay me for my sittings."

He had been almost ashamed to make the proposal, and had done so rather to propitiate the widow than for any other reason.

"Well," said he, "I only spoke for the sake of La Sappi. If you are sitting to me you cannot be making flowers for her, you know. I only want to do what is right. That ought to be the rule for all of us, Tina," he added, with the sententious superiority of an intensely self-conscious morality.

"Well, then," said the widow, with that ready eye to the main chance which makes so prominent a feature in the Tuscan character, and by no means desirous of sparing Signor Lonari's pocket, "if that is it, you shall pay me

for the use of my room. That will be no more than what is right. Though it was not likely that that poor little thing was going to take your money, as I should have thought your honour must have known."

"Very well, then, so be it. I suppose it comes much to the same thing," said Pippo, not with a very good grace.

And with that he took himself off.

In the evening, after dusk, Pippo's painting-tools were brought to the widow's room. And the following morning with the earliest light he was there to begin his work.

They were strangely-passed hours, those sittings in the little flower manufactory, with the easel and the model in front of one little window, and the widow with her gay bits of coloured stuff, her tools and her flowers, at the other. Very few words were spoken. Pippo's heart was wholly in his work. Never had he begun a sketch from La Beata which seemed to promise so well, and in which she appeared to him to hit off more perfectly, or to embody more successfully, the required conception. The satisfactory progress of the work beneath his hand, and the anticipation of success, kept him in high spirits and excellent good humour.

Tina would have found it difficult to say whether the hours thus passed were more a source of gratification or of pain. It was certain that on those few days when Pippo did not come to his work, the blank was a disappointment to her. The consciousness that she was contributing to his success was very gratifying to her. The sitting—or standing rather, for the latter was the attitude chosen for the picture—was extremely fatiguing; and it was soothing to her to feel that she was exerting her last remaining strength and energies in his service. She had a melancholy pleasure, too, in finding herself once again engaged in her old office, and standing, so far at least, in the same relation towards him which she had occupied in happier days. There was a pleasure in this, but it was a very sad one; and many a long hour of the night was passed by her in weeping over every little point of contrast with the days gone by, sug-

gested to her imagination by each turn of his voice and shade of his manner during the day's work.

For Pippo prescribed to himself, and admirably observed, a line of conduct of the strictest consistency. To most men, even of those capable of making for themselves such a conjuncture of circumstances, it would have been impossible to avoid the touch of some small heart-probing memory, some suggestive association, impelling them to yield at least momentarily to the sway of former feelings. Not so Pippo. He was too completely self-sustained to be guilty of such weakness. Any exclusive and thoroughly monopolising passion is a source of power. And this power was supplied to him by the intensity of his selfishness. He saw clearly, as he fancied, what his interests and fortunes required in the matter; and he ruled his conduct accordingly with the undivided enthusiasm of a fanatic.

And so the picture of Santa Filomena was painted.

The select few who were permitted to see it on the easel were loud in praise of the admirable conception and execution of the work. His reverence Canon Capucci had seen it two or three times while it was in progress; for cautious Pippo, remembering the word the priest had let drop as to the possibility of his visiting the studio, and fearing that he might do so, perhaps repeatedly, and find him always absent, had taken the precaution of calling on him, and requesting that he would afford the work the great advantage of his judgment and criticism, and visit it for that purpose on a day when the artist should let him know that the picture was at a point to make his observations the most valuable. He had accordingly carried the picture to his studio two or three times, on each of which occasions the priest had been invited to visit it. And every time he had cordially expressed his admiration and approval.

In fact, it was a striking picture;—somewhat hastily painted and dashed in *alla brava*, as was inevitable from the shortness of time allowed for the work, though Pippo, to do him justice, had laboured with constancy from morning to night upon it;—but full of spirit, admirably expres-

sive, and well calculated for the purpose for which it was intended. The attitude chosen was very like that of the Saint Cecilia in Raffael's celebrated picture at Bologna. But the hands were clasped in front of the body; and the long and abundant hair,—that beautiful wavy hair of Tina's, which had alone retained all its beauty unimpaired,—flowed unconfined over the shoulders. Pippo's directions to his model had been to assume an expression of prayer and intercession. It had been of late the most familiar of all expressions to her features. And as she stood there before him, with the thoughts we wot of passing through her heart and brain, it is probable that she had not much need to simulate the expression required.

It was about ten days before Easter when Pippo announced that he should need no further sittings, and that he should that evening send for his picture and easel, to complete the work at his studio. The sudden announcement, which he had purposely made as sudden as might be, "to avoid what might be disagreeable to both parties," was a shock to La Beata. Sad as were all the suggestions and surrounding circumstances of her daily task for some weeks past, she had come to look for it, and would have preferred that it should be continued. She no longer flattered herself that it was at all likely she should see Pippo again unless some new need brought him to her. And it seemed to her little likely that this should occur before the hour of her own release should arrive. And the thought that she might perhaps never see his face again was heavy upon her as he stood on the point of leaving the widow's room.

"I shall see you again once more before I die, Pippo?" she said, as he took her passive hand in his to wish her good-bye; "will you promise me that, Pippo?"

"Pooh! pooh! what reason have you to talk about dying? Of course, we shall see each other often and often again. I am sure I hope so!" said he.

"But promise me for the once!" she insisted, speaking with solemnity, and looking with those sad large eyes into

his, with an expression that almost awed him ;—"promise me that if I send to you, and tell you it is for the last time you will come to me !"

"Of course ! of course, I shall come to you if you ask me to do so, last time or not, Tina. I wish you would not talk in such a ridiculous manner."

"At all events, I have your promise, Pippo ! I hardly think I could rest quietly in my grave if you were not to keep it," she rejoined with sad earnestness.

And so they parted.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PROCESSION AND THE TRIUMPH.

Pippo did not feel altogether comfortable as he walked home from the *Via del Corso* to his studio. Everything was going well with him. He was contented with his picture ; his patrons, and all who had seen it, praised it ; and he anticipated no small triumph from the public exhibition of it. Old Laudadio grew more cordial in his manner from day to day ; Beppina was more than gracious, and always scolded him if he omitted his all but nightly visit to the *cereria*. He could hardly doubt that all his great hopes were about to be realised, and that a career more prosperous than he had ever dreamed of a few months ago was before him. Yet he could not prevent his mind's eye from resting on La Beata and her history, as on a dark spot in the bright landscape.

Those last words of hers, and her manner of saying them, would recur to his imagination and irked him. He had acted in strict accordance with prudence and duty in the matter, as he repeated to himself over and over again. And what stuff had she got in her head about dying ! She did not look at all like dying !—looked better, indeed,

much better than when she was with him in the *Via dell' Amore*,—had got a colour in her cheeks now, which was more than she ever used to have. See him once again! A parcel of romantic girlish nonsense! No doubt, he should see her again, the wife of some honest tradesman or other, and then he would paint her picture for her,—a family group with three or four lumping brats around her.

But still it would not do! The deep, solemn look of those melancholy far-away looking eyes would haunt him;—tormented him, till the expression of them, and the words which had accompanied it, became fixed in his mind; and the simple promise, exacted by poor Tina's clinging love, seemed to take the form of a menace. There was something too in those sunken cheeks, and in that dreary lassitude of manner which, talk to himself as he might about girlish nonsense, made this menace of one more meeting on this side of the grave a subject of uneasiness and almost of fear to him.

The best remedy in the world, however, for unpleasant thoughts was ready for him, when he reached his studio, in the shape of hard work. The completion of his picture by the last day in Lent, according to the terms he had agreed to, would require the most assiduous labour during the ten days which remained to him. And in fact, during that time he did work from the earliest to the latest light, and only left his studio to eat a hurried bit of dinner in the evening, before going to labour at that other great work he had in hand at the *cereria*, the winning of the heiress of it.

At last the final touches had been put to Santa Filomena, and with the exception of the varnishing, which it had been decided should be done after the procession, the picture was finished, and on the last day of Lent carried, by direction of Canon Capucci, to the sacristy of a small church on the further, or Pitti, side of the Arno, where at an hour named his reverence, with three or four other persons, were waiting to receive it. The artist was welcomed with many compliments, and the picture was much admired by the

small company in the sacristy. The Canon had little or no doubt, he said, that the exalted personage for whom the work had been executed, would be perfectly well satisfied with it; and that if Signor Lonari would call on him at San Lorenzo that evening at eight, he hoped to be able then to signify to him the approval of his employer, and would, at the same time, pay him for his work.

Pippo was, as may be supposed, punctual to his appointment. Even a Tuscan can contrive to be so when he has to receive money.

The Canon was more gracious than ever. The exalted lady had been pleased to express her entire approval, and admiration of the picture. She had even gone the length of saying that it satisfactorily embodied her own conception of the Saint's features and character—which, under the circumstances, was remarkable—and she had much pleasure in forwarding by his, the Canon's, hands a sum in payment which it was hoped would be satisfactory.

The sum therewith handed to him by his reverence was ridiculously inadequate to the payment of his work, even at journeyman's wages for the days he had laboured. Pippo, however, transferred it to his pocket with a low bow, and many thanks for the liberality with which he had been treated, and proceeded at once to write an acknowledgment of payment in full. "Right-thinking" people have no difficulty in understanding each other. And when about ten days afterwards Pippo received an intimation that one of the several studios in a building belonging to the State, which had formerly been a convent, but was now divided into a number of excellent studios for such right-thinking sculptors and painters as seemed worthy of so much favour, was placed at his disposition, he understood perfectly well that the money he had received from Canon Capucci was the smallest part of the payment for his picture. And when, a little while afterwards, he received a summons to the palace of one of the wealthiest and most orthodox nobles in Florence, and was honoured by a very liberal commission to paint a portrait of the daughter of the house,

who was about to be married, he had no doubt as to the channel by which he had been recommended for the purpose, and felt how perfectly right he had been in making no difficulty about the remuneration for the Santa Filomena.

Of course, immediately after leaving his reverence Canon Capucci, Pippo hurried to the *cereria*, where he found his friends eagerly awaiting the result.

"Well, my boy, has it pleased? Has it given satisfaction in high quarters? Was his reverence content?" asked Signor Laudadio.

And when Pippo was able to answer all these questions satisfactorily,

"Ah!" said he, "I had no doubt about it, since I saw the picture. I knew the effect it would produce! I congratulate you with all my heart, my dear boy. And you won't feel proud to-morrow, when all Florence is admiring your work! Oh, no! not at all! This is better than making copies for Englishmen, eh!"

"You don't know how curious I am to see the picture, 'gnor Pippo," said Beppina. "You know I am to walk in the procession with twenty other girls—that is with nineteen others, for there are to be twenty of us in all—and I shall see nothing but the back of the picture all the way. Then after us will follow the singers, and then the priests with the *santissimo*; and after them all the members of the new confraternity, and Papa among them. So that there's only Aunt Assunta who will see the procession; we shall have to make it. What a grand day it will be! I have got my white dress all ready, and my wreath of white roses came home just now. I have not tried it on yet. I'll run and get it, and you shall tell me how to put it on."

"A pretty fatiguing job it will be for me with my poor leg, I doubt," said old Laudadio, "all across the bridge, and through the *Piazza*, and half way up the *Via Calzaiuoli*, then all along the *Corso*, and so by the *Via del Proconsolo*, and the *Duomo*, and the *Via dei Servi*, to the *Santissima Annunziata*. There is to be a short service at

Or' San Michele and at the *Duomo*; and that will give one time to rest a few minutes. But I don't mind owing to you, friend Pippo, that I shall be glad when it's over."

Here pretty Beppina came tripping in with her white moss-rose wreath; and then there was a long coquetting consultation about how it should be worn, whether a little backwarder or a little forwarder, and how the magnificent abundance of black hair should be worn under it. And Pippo, as he gave his artistic advice on these points, could not help feeling that Beppa Benincasa would be an extremely attractive girl, even had she not been heiress to the *cereria*, and all the savings that had been accumulated from it.

"I know what you will be thinking of at the procession to-morrow, Signor Pippo," said she; "you will be thinking of the day when Giotto's Madonna was carried through *Borg' Allegri*, and saying in your heart that some one of the streets we pass through, at least, ought henceforward to be called *Via di Santa Filomena*, when you see all the town delighted with your picture."

"I am afraid," returned he, "that all the town will find something in the procession much more worth looking at than my picture; and at all events I am quite sure," he added, as he stood close behind her looking over her shoulder at her face in the great glass on the console, before which she was trying her wreath, "I am quite sure that I shall be thinking of somebody else than Giotto or the Madonna either."

"Fie!" said Beppina in a state of great delight; "I am sure I shall be thinking only of my prayers, unless it may be a little now and then of keeping the wax of the tapers from falling on my new white dress."

"And now that the picture is painted and done," said Aunt Assunta, "I suppose you know what you are to get for it? How much is it, Signor Pippo?"

"Oh! I was paid at once in the most liberal manner," returned he; "but I took little heed of the amount. One does not think so much of that part of the matter when

one works for the church and the advancement of religion, Signora Assunta."

"That's right, my dear boy!" cried the old wax-chandler; "those are the right sentiments; and nothing is ever lost by them in the long run; trust an old man!"

"I felt sure, my dear sir, that you would approve of my looking at the matter in that light," said Pippo, affecting to put himself in the relationship of a dutiful and respectful son towards the old man.

"And you were quite right. And I say, Pippo, you will eat a bit of dinner here with us after the ceremony to-morrow. *Per Bacco*, I shall want my dinner by that time: and then in the evening, if you can get Beppina to give you leave, we will go into my counting-house together and have a little talk."

Pippo seemed to walk on air as he returned to his studio that night. He was quite sure what the little talk was to be about. "It's all right, and no mistake about it," said he to himself; "the cautious old fellow has been waiting to see the success of the picture. I thought as much. Beppina is ready enough; no fear of her!" And with these exulting thoughts in his head, he went to bed; and dreaming that he was looking over Beppina's shoulder at her rose-crowned head in the glass, the figure gradually changed to that of La Beata, with wan face and strange-looking, large eyes beckoning him to her death-bed.

But the dark hours and the dark thoughts passed away together; and the morning of Easter Sunday, the great day of triumph for Pippo and Santa Filomena, was ushered in by as bright a sun as the most eager devotee of the newly-promoted saint could desire.

The procession was to take place in the afternoon; and it had been arranged that Pippo should escort Aunt Assunta and Beppina to the grand ceremonial service at the Duomo in the morning; Signor Laudadio declaring that he should content himself with hearing a low mass before breakfast, and should then keep quiet to prepare himself for the extraordinary exertions of the afternoon.

In general the grand ecclesiastical ceremonies of Roman Catholic countries are apt to appear to a sober Protestant Englishman utterly unlike anything answering to his idea of the duty and advantage of going to church. But the grand Easter service at the cathedral of Florence cannot seem, one would think, to any human being of any communion to have aught in common with a meeting for the purpose of worship. A great number of the peasantry from the neighbouring country are wont to flock into the city on the occasion, not so much for the sake of being present at the mass, as to witness a very singular ceremony peculiar to Florence, which has been practised there from a very remote antiquity, on the day before Easter Sunday.

The mass itself is also, of course, an attraction. The music is naught. And it is a curious fact that among a people so musical church music should stand at a lower ebb than in any other country in Europe. The frequenters of Italian churches prefer that all the money which can be afforded for the splendour of the church functions should be expended for the eye rather than for the ear; and of course the reverend personages who have to cater for their tastes in such matters understand and minister to their preference. Hence abundance of upholstery, magnificent hangings, and splendid illuminations are to be seen in the churches; but very little good music is ever to be heard.

On the occasion in question, it is true there would be little possibility of hearing it, be it what it might. A line from the west door to the altar is kept by troops for the passage of the court and the courtiers, all in their best gilt coats, and the archbishop and *his* court in their still more magnificent braveries. But the whole of the remaining space of the enormous church is filled with a mass of people packed as closely as they can stand. It is a wonder that there is never either disorder or noise on such occasions. But the never-failing gentleness, courtesy, and good humour of the Tuscan character are such as to induce every one, whether citizen or peasant, to bear his share in

the discomfort of the jam, cheerfully, and to inconvenience his neighbour as little as possible. Here and there in the close packed mass of human beings a voice may be heard in the midst of the service raised in anger ; but the words uttered are sure to be English from one or the other side of the Atlantic ; and perhaps a strange swaying movement may be observed in the crowd, like a circumscribed eddy in a large piece of water ; but this, too, will be found to be caused by the frantic efforts of some English or American cavaliers, who have been stupid enough to bring ladies into the crowd, and are exhibiting prowess “ worthy of a better cause,” in striving to keep them from contact with the commonalty, who look on with tolerant and amused, but utterly mystified wonderment.

But the sight which has attracted most of the country folks to the city is the *scoppio del carro*, which takes place precisely at mid-day on the Saturday. The “ blowing up of the car ” is effected in this wise. A huge structure of timber some thirty or forty feet high is raised on wheels and drawn to the front of the great western door of the cathedral, in the space between it and the baptistry ; this is the “ carro.” It is adorned with garlands and abundantly hung all over with crackers, and rockets, and detonating fireworks of all sorts ; and a long line, of which one end is fixed to the high altar, passes down the nave of the church and out through the wide open doors, and is at the other end attached to the *carro*. The ancient practice, continued till recently, was, at a certain point in the celebration of the mass to let loose a dove with a light affixed to its tail, attached in such a manner to the line which has been described that it could fly in the direction of the *carro*, but in no other. The intention was, as will be understood, that the dove should carry the light to the gunpowder prepared for it, and so fire all the pyrotechnic devices on the car. And upon the due success of this manœuvre the peasants founded auguries as to the agricultural prosperity or the reverse of the coming summer—auguries which were so implicitly and

extensively believed that it became a matter of serious consequence that the dove should not fail in his very undove-like mission. Yet, as may easily be imagined, failures often took place. Modern ingenuity, however, and the "march of mind" have remedied this, and found the means of compelling the augury to be favourable. A model of a dove, so contrived as to run along the cord and carry the match with certainty, is now substituted for the real bird; and the "scoppio del carro" takes place with the utmost regularity, and prophecies admirable harvests every year, to the perfect contentment of the Tuscan agricultural mind.

Pippo duly conducted home Beppina and her chaperon, both highly delighted with their morning's amusement,—the first naturally enough, as all lads and lasses will understand, and the second somewhat less intelligibly, with having been hustled by a metropolitan crowd, and become entitled to some infinitesimal share of an archiepiscopal blessing:—and leaving them to make their preparations for the ceremonial in the afternoon, in which at least Beppina was to be a more prominent actor, went off rather nervously to bethink him what he should do during the procession.

Of course he was anxious to witness the impression he expected his picture would produce; and, moreover, if he were to shut himself up the while, it was probable that his absence might be remarked, and would appear very strange. But he was by no means easy about the passing off of the ceremony as regarded himself. The natural thing would have been for one in his place to have made a party with three or four friends and comrades of the brush, and so mix with the crowd at different points in the procession. On such occasions one wants the support and countenance of friends. But Pippo had no friends among his old comrades. He was not only isolated but regarded, as he was well aware, with hostility and contempt by most of them. He was perfectly well aware that the story of his desertion of La Beata, and the motive for that desertion,

was well known to the whole confraternity of artists. And he was especially afraid of the comments and questions that were likely to be caused when it should be observed, as it infallibly would by those who had most of them known her features so well, who it was that had served him as a model for the new picture. He did not very clearly account for the feeling to himself; but he was exceedingly unwilling to hear any remarks or be called on to answer any questions on that subject.

Though he did not think it prudent to take the strong step of altogether disguising himself, he put on a hat as unlike that he usually wore as possible, and a cloak which he was not in the habit of using; and hoping thus to escape notice, sallied forth about the time the procession was to start, and posted himself near the corner of the Piazza, trying hard to assume the air of not being there in waiting for anything in particular. But he had to wait so long that he began to think that something had occurred to put off the ceremony.

At last, however, as he was on the point of going towards the bridge to see if such were indeed the case, the droning voices of a dozen or so of men chanting the litanies which had been prepared for the occasion, were heard approaching from the *Via Vacchereccia*; and in a minute or two afterwards the procession began to defile into the great Piazza. There were first a score or so of men in shabby white gowns over their coats, with Signor Laudadio limping along at the head of them, each having a huge wax taper in his hand, and vociferating with all the power of his lungs. Then came THE PICTURE, borne aloft by two porters, also in dirty white gowns, and kept steady by others holding cords fixed to the top of it. Then came the clergy and the host, and after them the company of twenty young girls, all in white, and all with white wreaths on their heads, among whom our little friend Beppina very conspicuously bore the bell. The procession was closed by a company of Capuchin friars, always had out to do duty on similar occasions. "All Florence" following in the wake

of the procession, was represented by a few score of old men and women, chiefly the latter, of the poorest classes, who, having no amusement of any kind for their Sunday afternoon, thought they might as well as not earn a few days' indulgence, and take the chance of being favourably noticed by the clergy. The cortège was of course attended by the usual number of ragged urchins from ten to fifteen years old. But these were as usual engaged in assiduously collecting the droppings from the great wax candles, each person in the procession being flanked by one of these attendants, holding a funnel-shaped piece of dirty paper under his candle. The eccentric motion imparted to old Laudadio's candle by his lameness made the task of gathering his spoils a lucrative but proportionately an arduous one.

Pippo hardly knew whether to be more disappointed at the small interest the whole affair seemed to excite, or glad of the absence of all those likely to know anything of him and his private affairs. He followed the procession as far as the corner of the *Via del Corso*; but there stopped. *She* would be sure, he thought, to be looking out of the window as the procession passed by; and he felt that he would rather just then avoid meeting that countenance.

The *Via Calzaiuoli* is always full of people on a fine Sunday afternoon; and Santa Filomena and her attendants had in that part of their progress, therefore, to make their way through almost a crowd. It was just where there were most people, about the corner of the *Corso*, that Pippo, as he stood under a doorway while the procession passed on, suddenly heard his name, "Lonari," mentioned by an evidently foreign tongue. Turning quickly in the direction of the voice, and at the same time bringing the fold of his cloak over the lower part of his face, he saw Mr. Patringham with his daughter on his arm, who was evidently pointing out to her father his picture. She had clearly recognised the features of "Signora Lonari," as she called her; and was urging her father to ascertain, if he could, whether the picture had in fact been painted from her,

"What devil's luck brought those heretics here to look at the procession?" thought Pippo to himself. But the worst was to come; for the next moment he saw Mr. Patringham, leaving his daughter's arm for a moment, step up to an elderly man standing on a doorstep not three yards from him, and heard him say—

"Pray, sir, can you tell me if it is known after what original that picture of the saint has been painted?"

"It has been painted after a poor girl whom the artist seduced and then most infamously deserted. I suppose he will be made president of the Academy in consequence!" said Signor Borsoli, the *frondeur*, as he turned on his heel and walked off; for the old gentleman to whom Mr. Patringham had addressed himself was, as it chanced, no other than our old acquaintance.

"I am afraid there is an ugly story here," said Mr. Patringham, returning to his daughter. "I will tell you another time. Signor Tanari ought not to have introduced me, as he did, to that man."

All this passed within earshot of Pippo, and tended not a little to spoil the enjoyment of his day of triumph. Disagreeables, as he foresaw, would arise from this discovery. Was it on the cards that any such scandal attaching to his name should reach the ears of the old wax-chandler, as might interfere with his intentions regarding Beppina?

Pippo debated this question with himself anxiously, as he walked home to prepare for the important dinner, and evening at the *cereria*. But it appeared to him that there was very small probability that the talk of a social circle so widely divided from that of his proposed father-in-law should reach him, and if it should in some degree do so, it might easily be pooh-poohed as mere calumny born of envy and jealousy. "Only let me get on, till Beppina and I are one," thought he to himself, "and I shall care little what they say."

“And now Tanari, and Patringham and the rest of them may quarrel it out as they like. I can afford to laugh at them all!” said Pippo, as returning from the grand dinner at the *cereria*, he threw himself into an easy chair, and gave himself up to the pleasant occupation of castle-building on a very satisfactorily sound foundation.

For that evening all had been settled between him and Signor Benincasa and Beppina. And he had been presented to the party assembled, consisting of one or two of the priests who had officiated in the procession, Signor Marradi the *fattore*, and Aunt Assunta, together with two or three old friends of the family and their wives, as the son-in-law elect of the wealthy wax-chandler.

CHAPTER XV.

TINA'S LETTER.

THE marriage had been fixed for the twenty-fourth of June,—the nativity of St. John,—the great Florentine festival of the year. On the vigil of that day are celebrated the games,—the races of chariots built in the form of the ancient biga, drawn by steeds caparisoned in accurately copied mediæval style—(and supplied for the occasion by the post-horse office)—and driven by analogously costumed charioteers—(travestied post-boys of the same establishment). On the day itself take place the races of riderless horses, through the flag-paved and densely crowded streets of the town, according to the old intensely civic spirit, which insisted on having its amusements, as well as its more serious interests, inside the city walls;—the same spirit that was wont to celebrate “wild beast hunts” in the great square, and represent pirate ships on cruise in the streets. On the vigil there are the grand fireworks on the Carraia bridge, and the whole course of the Arno, and the

mighty dome of the cathedral, the matchless tower of Giotto, and the ancient palace of the republic are ablaze with illuminations.

Most of the throng of visitors of all nations who come to winter at Florence, have quitted it before the time comes round for this high Florentine festival. A few may have been induced to delay their departure for the baths and other summer resorts for the sake of witnessing the city of flowers at its mediæval masquerading. But the crowd has gone; and the Florentines are left to live their own lives, and enjoy their summer holiday.

Pippo was not made uneasy by this delay. When the ceremony of betrothal had taken place, he considered himself safe. After that has occurred, there are fewer slips between cup and lip in such matters in continental life than among ourselves. Ladies are not allowed the same latitude in the privilege of changing their minds. Those who are "*fidanzati*" are held to be, though not absolutely and irrevocably, yet morally and by social opinion bound to each other. And Pippo had no fear that either his eminently respectable father-in-law or his promised bride would think of breaking, unless on very serious grounds indeed, the pledge of betrothal.

The intervening weeks passed pleasantly enough in installing himself in the new studio gratuitously placed at his disposition by the government,—in executing one or two profitable commissions, which his new connection had already procured for him,—in nightly visits to the *ceneria*,—and in dreaming very securely that his greatness was a-ripening. One or two little unpleasantnesses occurred; but he strove to make up his mind to care nothing about them. The copy he had made for Mr. Patringham in the Pitti gallery had long since been sent home and paid for. But the picture, which that gentleman had ordered, and which has been described in a former chapter, was still unfinished, when the order for the Saint Filomena had been given; and had been laid aside while that more important commission had been in progress. When it was

finished Pippo felt rather at a loss how to proceed in the matter. He was extremely unwilling, with the recollection of that little conversation, overheard at the corner of the *Via del Corso* on the day of the procession, in his mind, to present himself before Mr. Patringham, from whom since that day he had heard nothing. Nor could he make up his mind to send his picture to him, as a tailor might send home a coat, with his bill. After some meditation, therefore, he determined to send the picture to Signor Tanari, with the request that he would be the medium of its transfer to Mr. Patringham, and mentioning that the price agreed upon was so much, and that as a matter of course Signor Tanari would deduct his commission upon the transaction. But the picture was brought back by the bearer with a verbal message to the effect that Mr. Patringham and his family had left Florence a fortnight ago, and a slip of paper, on which was written—

“Signor Tanari declines to concern himself with this or any other work of Signor Filippo Lonari.”

This was disagreeable enough. It was not that the little picture seemed to be thrown on his hands; nor even that the refusal of the most accredited picture-dealer in Florence to have any dealings with him was likely to affect perniciously his future career as an artist. He flattered himself that he should be in a position to care very little about any small addition to his means that might be derivable from such sources. But it was painful to feel himself thus outlawed, as it were, by the members of his craft. He could not doubt that Signor Tanari spoke only the general sentiment of the members of the profession towards him. Indeed, they had most of them found means in one way or another to show him the cold shoulder. It would not do to repeat to himself that his friendships would henceforward be formed in quite a different sphere and circle of society; and that his position would shortly be one which the most prosperous of his quondam comrades, or even Signor Tanari himself, might, and would, envy. The world to whose opinions and judgments a man feels

I ought similarly to think no more of you. But this does not seem right to my mind; and even if it did seem right, it is impossible to me. In the first place I am not sure, Pippo, that you have no love for me any more; for it may be that it is necessary for you, for many reasons which I cannot understand, to leave me. But even if I were sure of it I could not address you otherwise than I have written at the beginning of this letter. For whether you love me or not I cannot help loving you the same as ever. I cannot; and I have no wish to do so. For though I have prayed very much for some things, I have never prayed that my love should cease. But I have prayed that I might be taken out of this world, which seems to me so wearisome and dreary. I have prayed for this, and I am sure that the blessed Virgin has heard my prayer, and that it will soon be granted. And I write now, therefore, to remind you of your promise that you would let me see you once more before I die; and to tell you that the time is come for fulfilling it. I am going to die. But you must not suppose, my dear love, that you have caused my death by leaving me. When the people here have told me so, I have answered how wrong it is to say so. For I have prayed to die; and my death, therefore, is my own doing. And when I have seen you once again I think that I can die content. If you can tell me, Pippo, when you come, that you do still love your poor Tina, and that we are parted only by necessities, which I do not understand, and not because you have ceased to care for me, then I am sure I shall die happy. But I know that you will not tell me so if it is not true. And see now, Pippo dear, you must come to the address written below. Things have been going ill with us,—La Sappi and me;—and we have been forced to leave the old rooms in the Corso and come here. We could not earn enough to pay the rent; and so we came to live here in the same house with La Sappi's sister, where the rent is much less. They are very good to me,—La Sappi and her sister, and brother-in-law, and let me want for nothing.

condition the old man consented to undertake the unwonted labour of a day's pleasuring.

But in truth to anyone with an eye for the picturesque and the beautiful, and a temper ready to share in the enjoyment of a whole population of happy holiday makers, an Ascension-day visit to the Cascine does not absolutely need one's twentieth year, and the presence of an affianced lover, to make it very pleasant. It is difficult to imagine a lovelier spot for holiday-making of the kind. There are sunny meadows and shady copses, violet-grown banks and marble benches, crowded promenades and sequestered sylvan alleys; and the whole is shut in and backed by the range of the lower Apennines, glowing with such purple bloom in the sunlight, as might make the discoverer of the Solferino-dye despair, and dotted all over with those innumerable villas which made the poet declare that if they were gathered within a wall, they would make Florence equal to two Romes. Add to the permanent beauty of the spot, the varied and picturesque groups of intensely merry but always perfectly sober revellers of all ages, both sexes, and various classes, and it is easy to understand that the scene must be a more than ordinarily attractive one.

Many parties leave the city at break of day to begin their holiday with a breakfast *al fresco*. But our friends from the *cereria* had settled to start at noon; and Pippo was to join them there a little before that time. He had just completed a careful toilette, and was on the point of starting for the *cereria*, when a letter was given to him by a boy who said he had been told to deliver it into his own hands. The address was written in a hand quite new to him. He opened the paper hurriedly and with some irritation at being thus delayed at the moment of setting forth to keep his appointment, and read as follows:—

“MY OWN BELOVED!

“They tell me that I ought not to address you with such words, that you no longer care for me, and that

I ought similarly to think no more of you. But this does not seem right to my mind ; and even if it did seem right, it is impossible to me. In the first place I am not sure, Pippo, that you have no love for me any more ; for it may be that it is necessary for you, for many reasons which I cannot understand, to leave me. But even if I were sure of it I could not address you otherwise than I have written at the beginning of this letter. For whether you love me or not I cannot help loving you the same as ever. I cannot ; and I have no wish to do so. For though I have prayed very much for some things, I have never prayed that my love should cease. But I have prayed that I might be taken out of this world, which seems to me so wearisome and dreary. I have prayed for this, and I am sure that the blessed Virgin has heard my prayer, and that it will soon be granted. And I write now, therefore, to remind you of your promise that you would let me see you once more before I die ; and to tell you that the time is come for fulfilling it. I am going to die. But you must not suppose, my dear love, that you have caused my death by leaving me. When the people here have told me so, I have answered how wrong it is to say so. For I have prayed to die ; and my death, therefore, is my own doing. And when I have seen you once again I think that I can die content. If you can tell me, Pippo, when you come, that you do still love your poor Tina, and that we are parted only by necessities, which I do not understand, and not because you have ceased to care for me, then I am sure I shall die happy. But I know that you will not tell me so if it is not true. And see now, Pippo dear, you must come to the address written below. Things have been going ill with us,—La Sappi and me ;—and we have been forced to leave the old rooms in the Corso and come here. We could not earn enough to pay the rent ; and so we came to live here in the same house with La Sappi's sister, where the rent is much less. They are very good to me,—La Sappi and her sister, and brother-in-law, and let me want for nothing.

"Come quick, Pippo, my own love! I know that I shall see you again before I die.

"Always your own TINA."

All this was written in a clear and clerkly hand, very unlike anything which poor little Tina could have accomplished. For the professional letter writer, whom we read of as such a prominent personage in the East, is still extant in Italy; and the people have recourse to his services without any repugnance, in matters which the more reserved natures of our own countrymen, of whatsoever class, would hardly like to confide to a third person.

At the foot of the letter was written very legibly the address to which he was to go. But Pippo never looked at it. By the time he had read to the end of the letter he was quite angry with the writer. The few words which spoke of the change of residence and its cause did occasion him a twinge of conscience. But he readily made it all right with himself by determining that he would behave very liberally to the poor girl as soon as he should be master of Beppina's fortune. As for the rest it really was too bad, this persistence in hunting him down and claiming him, when she must have perceived clearly enough that all was necessarily over between them. And then all that stuff and nonsense about dying! As if people knew when they were going to die! And as if all girls in the same circumstances did not say the same thing! He flattered himself he was far too old a bird to be caught by such chaff as that! And as for his going to hunt through the town for her just at that time in the present position of his affairs,—that was a very likely thing! A pretty business it might be if his enemies should be able to make it appear to old Laudadio that he was still secretly keeping up his connection with her! She changes her residence, and he, evidently well acquainted with all her movements, forthwith visits her in her new abode! Why, such a step, if known, as two to one it would be, might ruin everything. Known! why, was it not likely enough that she

would take very good care that it *should* be known? And was it not very possible that this visit was so strongly urged with the express view of making it the means of throwing difficulties in the way of his marriage, and perhaps breaking it off altogether? No! no! If they were to meet again it should at least be after all had been made safe with Beppina.

It is strange how men will strive to impose on themselves by falsehoods exactly similar to those they would make use of for the sake of deceiving others;—how they will say to themselves in their own solitary meditations things which their own hearts know to be untrue at the moment the mind coins them, with the expectation that in some way or other they will before some tribunal or other justify acts which the will has determined on, but which the conscience condemns. Pippo knew in his very inmost heart that no such thought as that which he had attributed to her had ever passed through Tina's mind,—knew it as certainly as if he could have read her heart far more clearly than he could read his own. Nevertheless he felt as if he was somehow justifying himself by pretending to himself to believe the unworthy suspicion which his mind had suggested.

But some men have the gift of duping their consciences more completely than others. And in this case, at least, Pippo's sophistry was but very imperfectly successful. He remained, despite all he could say to himself, uneasy on the subject. He could not get rid of the image of that wan, shrunken figure, with the solemn, melancholy, far-off-looking eyes, which gazed at him as he stood about to leave her in the room in the Corso; and as the haunting remembrance pursued him, his uneasiness took almost the hue of fear. What did she mean by that last sentence in her letter, "I know that I shall see you again before I die?" If she were so near death how could she know any such thing? At all events he was not going to seek her out in the new lodging to which she had chosen to take herself—he could tell her that—at least not till after his marriage. Then, perhaps,

he might see about it; and if she seemed disposed to behave reasonably, and not give him further annoyance, why he should be willing on his part to act liberally towards her. But as for dying and seeing him on her death-bed! Bah! he had no patience with such trash!

So Tina's letter was thrown aside; and he prepared to join his friends at the *cereria*, to go with them on their day's pleasuring to the Cascine.

And the sun shone brightly, and the birds in the woods were singing, and Beppina was in high glee; and the cold roast quarter of lamb and salad was excellent; and the champagne was first-rate—for Signor Laudadio was determined if he did dissipate to dissipate splendidly; though for his own part he preferred a good flask of Chianti to all the champagne in France—and the old folks took their siesta after their repast, as old folks should, both for their own and others' comfort and convenience; and a more delightful opportunity for making love was never offered if only a man had any love in his heart to make, instead of having a skeleton shut up in the cupboard of it.

Now, though Pippo was not insensible to the fact, that Beppina Benincasa was in truth a very pretty and attractive little personage, yet his *love* was for the wax-chandling savings and profits attached to her; and he "made it" appropriately, rather to her father than to herself, by such delicate attentions as enrolling himself among the brethren of the Misericordia, and other evidences of "right-thinking" tendencies. And then, on the other hand, the remembrance of La Beata's look, and of her letter, played the part of a skeleton quite sufficiently developed to destroy any pleasure he might have found in the little festival, had he been in a more joyous state of mind. As it was, poor little Beppina could not help finding him a provokingly dull and backward lover; and the day which had been destined with so much premeditation to especial enjoyment was felt, at least by her, to have turned out a failure.

But even holidays come to an end; and when on parting

at the door of the *cereria*, to which Pippo had escorted his *fiancée*, she whispered, "Come to-morrow evening; and do come in better humour, *Caro*, than you have been to-day," he was fain to plead the standing excuse of a bad headache.

"I tried hard to conceal it from you, dearest," he said, "but it is difficult to deceive the observation of loving eyes. I shall be better, I have no doubt, to-morrow."

So kind-hearted little Boppina said to herself as she undressed: "Poor dear Pippo! what a shame of me to think that he was cross, and he suffering, and trying to hide it all the time. I must make it up to him, dear fellow, to-morrow night."

And Pippo as he went to bed, after smoking a solitary cigar at an unfrequented café, where he was sure of meeting nobody who knew him, said to himself—

"She saw that I was out of sorts plain enough! And all about that confounded letter! I have not been able to get it out of my head all day. But it will never do to go on so! It is all a parcel of trash and humbug; and I shall not give it another thought."

So he went to sleep, and dreamed that he was called away from the altar, as he was being married, to the death-bed of La Beata, who laughed, as he looked down on her death-stricken face, and repeated, "I knew that I should see you again before I died."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CALL OF THE BELL.

PIPPO was no further tormented by any tidings from La Beata, and gradually got rid of the impression her letter had made on his mind, despite his efforts to escape from it. And the time went on, and spring grew into summer, and

the great day—great to all Florence as the highest holiday of the year, but to Pippo as the goal of all his hopes and ambitions—the great day of St. Giovanni drew near.

The eve of the festival is, perhaps, even greater than the saint's day itself. On the latter take place the ecclesiastical celebrations; but on the former are performed those marvellously travestied mediæval chariot races, and the truly superb and beautiful illuminations and fireworks. Of course Pippo accompanied Beppina and her aunt to the Piazza of Santa Maria Novella to see the races, and to see the grand duke and his family and household seeing them. For it was an essential part of the duty of that paternal sovereign towards his people that he should be present annually on this occasion. The Piazza is encircled for the festa, with four or five ranges of seats, rising in amphitheatre fashion one above the other, and these were closely packed for a long time before the commencement of the sport by a multitude, contented to wait with the utmost good humour an hour for an entertainment of some ten minutes' duration. But the interval could be agreeably occupied by chat, and when did a Tuscan ever find too long an hour so employed? When at length the Piazza was cleared, the dense crowd which filled it disappearing by some mysterious process before a line of mounted gendarmes, like an ebbing tide, the well-remembered old chariots entered, with their sorry steeds and togaed post-boys; and the people cheered and made their bets on one or the other of the five equipages, quite as satisfactorily as if those pacific and unambitious functionaries had not previously settled, by private arrangement among themselves, which was to be the victor in these more or less Olympic games.

And then the unwieldy machines performed their cow-like gallop, one at the tail of the other, thrice round the Piazza; the dust flew, the people shouted, and the show was over.

In the evening the lovers were again together; and this time Signor Laudadio was of the party. The Italians are generally great in fireworks, and on the occasion in

question all the resources of the art are put in requisition. They take place always on the Carraia bridge, facing upwards towards the other bridges; and may therefore be seen to advantage either from any of the windows, balconies, or housetops of the houses on the Lungarno, or from the street itself on either side the river, or from either of the upper bridges. The selecter portion of the Florentines of course occupy, for the most part, the former, and the mobility the latter of these positions. But there is a third mode of seeing the fireworks, more enjoyable than either of these, which has also the advantage of rendering those who adopt it a very picturesque part of the general scene. This is to hire a boat, deck it gaily with awnings and coloured lamps, add perhaps a bugle and cornet-a-piston or two, and so, flitting about far down between the high quays, and momentarily lighting up the darkness of the gulf between them, look up from the surface of the dark water at the brilliancy above, unannoyed by the throng of the streets or the heat of crowded rooms.

It was this latter plan that the party from the *cereria* adopted on the occasion in question. It was a great and extraordinary luxury and expense for the old wax-chandler to indulge in; although he might very well have hired a boat every night in the year, if he had wished it, without being guilty of any financial imprudence. But old Laudadio walked in the frugal and thrifty ways of his Florentine trading forefathers, and eschewed unnecessary, and above all unusual expenses.

On the present great occasion, however, Beppina had with little difficulty persuaded her father to grant her this indulgence. The party consisted of the three old folks—Signor Marradi, Aunt Assunta, and Laudadio himself—and the young couple, Pippo and Beppina. A prettier scene, or a more admirable opportunity for that love-talk by tongue, eye, and hand, which should mark the eve of a bridal day with a stone so white as to shine out ever visible to memory through the long track of dim after-years, can hardly be imagined. And it is provoking to think

that it should have been thrown away on a lover so little worthy of it. Pippo was more expansive, indeed, than he had been on that Ascension-day, in the Cascine, now more than a month ago; for nothing had occurred to ruffle him or damp the exulting triumph with which he looked forward to the consummation of all his hopes on the morrow. He *did* sit with her hand in his, and he did talk to her during most of the evening in tones meant for her ear alone. But the topics of his talk were of a more practical and prosaic nature than that which poor little Beppina would have liked to hear—plans for the furnishing of the first floor over the *cereria*, as soon as the banking firm, who rented it, should be turned out; discussions as to the chamber best adapted for a painting-room; speculations as to the value of the business, &c., &c., instead of Beppina would have been quite at a loss to explain exactly what it was, which she would have preferred to hear rather than all this. But she felt that there *was* a kind of talk which would have been more to the purpose, quite as sensibly as might the most completely poesy-fed damsel under similar circumstances. Beppina, however, was not the girl to let any such falling off from the perfection of her beau-idéal make her unhappy. Pippo looked exceedingly handsome; and one cannot have everything!

When the fireworks were over, they left their boat to take a stroll through the city, and enjoy the fairy-land beauty of the illuminations. There is no city in the world which repays the cost of illuminating it so abundantly as fair Florence. There is something in the forms or in the colouring of the marble and stone of her churches and palaces, and “loggie,” and statues, or in the quality of the atmosphere, or perhaps even in that of the pure olive-oil used for the purpose, which produces a beauty magical beyond that of other places on like occasions. The moral atmosphere, also, of Florence, is not a little favourable to the enjoyment of such festivities. Everybody is in good humour, everybody is courteous, everybody is patient and forbearing. Nobody quarrels, nobody pushes, nobody

fighths, nobody picks pockets, nobody gets drunk. So that an hour's lounge among the piazzas and loggias of Florence, on a gala night at midsummer, stopping to hear, under the shadow of a grand old palace, here a strain of Bellini, and there again, in the full blaze of an open piazza, a brilliant morsel of Verdi, admirably executed by the bands stationed at different points, is as pleasant a pastime as one often meets with.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before the party returned from their stroll through the city to the *cereria*. As they entered the nest of little quiet streets in the midst of which it was situated, the lights, the hum of voices and laughter, and the music died away behind them, and the grim old palace belonging to the wax-chandler stood silent in its retirement, as if scorning to countenance the degenerate revelries of these latter days.

Old Laudadio had returned home before the rest of the party, having, very soon after leaving the boat, become tired of walking about, and saying that he would go and superintend the preparations for the supper in the garden behind the *cereria*, which was to conclude the day's festivities.

It was a pleasant spot that little garden in the heart of the city;—more so than the inhabitants of coal-consuming cities would be likely to imagine, judging from their own experience of city gardens. The southern wall was covered thickly by the dark-green foliage of three or four very old orange-trees of the bitter orange kind. It is a more hardy plant than the other, which will not live in the open air through a Florence winter. The other walls were hung with a luxuriant growth of Virginian creeper and Banksian rose. Then a number of beds raised a little within cut stone enclosures, and filled with the rich, brown soil gathered under the chestnut forests of the Vallombrosa mountains, which consists entirely of decayed chestnut-wood and leaves, were all a-bloom with camellias, rhododendrons, and azaleas. The peculiar soil above mentioned, which the bog-earth used by English gardeners for the

same purpose replaces in our gardens less advantageously, admirably suits all that class of plants, and contributes much to earn for Florence its title of the City of Flowers. In the two corners nearest the house, immediately in front of the wide flagged terrace on which the windows opened, were two large plants of *Olea fragrans*, which perfumed the whole place. At the further end,—one on either side of an old fountain in shell-work, long since waterless,—were two very lofty and admirably tapering cypress-trees; between which, framed in by their black-green spires, was seen the towering cupola of the cathedral—always a striking feature in the little landscape of Signor Laudadio's garden; but on the night in question all a-blaze with lamps from the drum to the cross, the powerful glare of which threw a strange and theatre-like light on the cypresses and between them athwart the garden below. It fell strongly on a large, oval basin of white marble, which formed the centre piece of the little garden, and on a pair of statues of the same material, which stood at the sides of the centre window of the terrace, against a background formed on either side of the window by huge, tall plants of crimson-flowered geranium. One thing an English eye would have missed in this little Florentine paradise,—a flooring of soft, green turf. This is unattainable in any perfection in Tuscany; and Tuscan gardeners wisely do not attempt it. All the space unoccupied by the objects which have been described, was gravel diversified by groups of flowering plants in pots of all sizes, from such as are ordinarily seen in our gardens to huge terracotta vases three or four feet high, and of proportional diameter.

The eye unaccustomed to Italian gardens at first finds it difficult to pardon the entire absence of our own beautiful green sward; but the most passionate lover of greenery would hardly have failed to admit that the little city garden behind the *cereria* was a very charming spot.

Especially he would have been disposed to find it such had he entered it after some four hours of sight-seeing

and rambling, and found, as was the case on the night in question, a table spread with very appetising-looking preparations for supper on the flag-stone terrace in front of the sitting-room windows.

Old Laudadio came limping along the terrace from the further end of it as the sight-seers entered through the window, bearing in either hand a dusty flask of right Montepulciano, each holding a good three bottles, such as bottles are in these days;—Montepulciano,—Redi's "king of all wines,"—grown before the hateful vine-disease was dreamed of; wine which a genuine Tuscan still considers such; and which any one whose tongue is not too delicate to pardon a little roughness, and who likes his juice of the grape unmixed, undoctored, unbranded, yet of generous quality and full flavour, may well prefer to many a vaunted growth of France. Having carefully wiped these delicately fragile glass bulbs, the old man proceeded knowingly to *uncork* them—if the metaphor may be used—by jerking out with a twist of the wrist the small quantity of olive-oil which, reposing on the top of the wine in the slender neck of the flask, closes it more hermetically than any cork could do, and placed one at either end of the table.

Signor Laudadio sat at one end, and *Fattore* Marradi, his brother-in-law, opposite to him. Beppina and Pippo sat on the side next the house, facing the cypress-trees and the illuminated dome beyond them, and Aunt Assunta opposite to them. And whatever may have been the case as to the previous amusement of the day, the supper was thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed by all of them. For supping is an amusement adapted, when not spoiled by dinner, to all capacities and all ages. And as the good wine did its office, talk flowed apace; and even Pippo was warmed into playing his part with a somewhat more successful imitation of those duties of his position, which poor little Beppina had sighed for as they sat together in the boat.

When they had finished supper, the two seniors drew

together at one end of the table with a flask between them, and lighted their cigars, while the young ones went to the piano, which stood just inside the open window ; and Aunt Assunta betook herself to the sofa, where she soon fell, as well she might, fast asleep.

"Now, *Signore mio*," said Beppina, as she placed herself at the piano, "what will you have? Shall it be '*Casta Diva*,' or one of the *Stornelli* Aunt Assunta is so fond of?"

"I can't say I think '*Casta Diva*' would be in keeping with the glare of lamplight streaming down into the garden there," said Pippo.

"And besides," added Beppina, with a mock sigh, "it would be easier to find in the *Stornelli* something adapted to my own position. For instance,

'Flower of the rue !
A jealous doubt weighs on my heart like lead ;
Come death to cure me, if my love's not true.'

Must the flower of the rue be my flower, eh, *caro mio*?" she added.

"Nay!" said he; "we'll have no such flower in our garden either now or ever, Beppina *mia*. I think, if it must needs be something *de circonstance*, that you might find a song to suit our case better than that."

"Is this more like it then, '*Lustrissimo Signore mio*?" she returned, looking up into his face with a gaze half tender, half arch, as she sang again:—

"Flower of the pine !
A dreamer seeks his number on the page *
As I my answer in those looks of thine."

"Not a bit of it, *amor mio*!" replied he; "you must try again; the answer you profess to look for has been given so often that I do not believe a word of any anxiety about the oracle. Try again."

* An allusion to the dream-books popular in Tuscany, which profess to expound the hidden signification of all dreams.

"Well then! here is one that I vow would have fitted you well enough as you sat in the boat just now, Pippo mio," said she, pretending to pout.

" 'Flower of the may!
The swallows talk of love beneath your eaves,
Yet, hard of heart, you heed not what they say.'

There was I, like one of those same swallows chattering away all my little endearments; but you had not a word to say, or else nothing but talk about houses, and doors, and windows, and such-like stupid matters!"

"Why! *cara mia*, I thought they were matters that interested you as much as me. Such things have to be talked about some time or other, have they not?" returned he, stupidly taking her laughing reproach much more seriously than she had dreamed of meaning it.

"Yes, I suppose so," she replied; "at some time, but not just such a time. Here is another:—

'Flower of the balm!
The nightingale sings loud, the fireflies glow;
But thou liest sleeping, for thy heart is calm.'

Or suppose we were to rhyme in this way," she continued, three parts jestingly, with just a point of pique:—

" 'Flower of the marigold!
The nightingale sings loud, the fireflies glow;
But thou sitt'st silent, for thy heart is cold.'

Is that the right reading, Pippo mio, eh?"

"Now, Beppina, that is too bad! You know well, how far it is from being the right reading. Cold, indeed! Ah! *anima mia*. I think you know better than that! I don't like your collection of *Stornelli* at all."

"Well then, shall we try some *Rispetti*?* What do you say to this now?"

* Another form of popular rhyme and song so called by the people, probably from being intended to convey the homage, "respect" of a lover to the object of his passion.

‘Dear heart, I strive to write thy name ;
 I strive, but all in vain ;
 The pen is blunt with sadness,
 The ink is clogged with pain.
 Bitter, bitter ink, I wot,
 Death will come, if thou do not.’

That of course you will understand to represent my state of mind, all those years that you never came near us, you naughty Pippo! Is my *Rispetto* more to your liking, sir?”

“Truly, Beppina *mia*, it is somewhat more to the purpose,” said Pippo, thinking it necessary to repair his short-comings in the boat by a daring draft on the resources of fiction; “for if you only suppose the persons changed, the rhyme tells in simple truth what I have felt, oh! how often, during those dark, dreary years. Ah! Beppina, you don’t know yet how miserable that time was! And have you never guessed *all* the reasons that made my destination to the Church intolerable to me?”

It is curious how naturally and readily a lie grows and amplifies itself. When Pippo began to speak, he had not thought of this last admirably improvised bit of delicate flattery.

“But still, my own!” added he, “you have failed to find anything befitting our happiness this night; for, thank God! your last describes what is past and gone for ever.”

“For ever, *caro mio*?” said Beppina, greatly delighted, poor, simple, little soul! with the prize her last cast of the net had brought her in, and bent on trying again. “For ever is a long word, Pippo *mio*; and if that one applies only to the past, perhaps this may describe the future;” and she sang, beginning with mock pathos, which changed to real sentiment as the spirit of the strain took hold of her mind:—

“Once thou wast only mine,
 Fair love! sweet love!
 But now another holds that heart of thine,
 Oh! faithless love!
 Hast thou forgotten quite the pleasant time
 Of love’s dear prime?”

Oh, blessed days with all your joy and pain,
 Can ye not come again ?
 Never more, back again !”

“ Why, Beppina! *anima mia!*” cried Pippo; “ I do think that you have the mournfullest and most uncomfortable set of ditties that ever filled the head of a willow-wearing damsel!—you of all the girls in the world the sunniest-hearted, happiest, brightest creature that ever made sunshine in a man’s heart by smiling on him. Come now! do sing something a little less melancholy. Trust me, my own precious sunbeam, laughing and not crying is your proper element.”

“ You are hard to please to-night, *Signore mio*,” said Beppina, with a profound mock sigh; “ but one must strive to content you, I suppose.”

“ Here’s a very pretty ditty; and you may take the warning to yourself, ’gnor Pippo. That time that you say was so miserable,—if all tales are true you were not thinking of poor Beppina the whole time. Perhaps your sighing is not *all* for her now. What do you say to this?—

‘ Beware of red lips that deceive thee
 With honey-sweet tone,
 And vow to love ever ; then leave thee,
 Poor victim ! alone.
 ’Tis dull work sighing
 For sands that are run ;—
 Sighing and dying
 Like meadow-grass drying
 Away in the sun.
 For the grass it fades, be it never so fair ;
 Beware !’

Ah, yes! *poor victim!* I’ll have no sighing for sands that are run! Eh, Pippo?”

There was something in the idea suggested of dying like the grass of the field, dried up by the sun, for the sake of “ sands that are run,” that produced a painful image in Pippo’s mind, shaping itself there to an application exactly the reverse of that intended by the song. He did not like

the chance, which had led Beppina so vaguely and innocently to touch a chord that vibrated so disagreeably in his memory.

“Bah!” he cried; “who dies now-a-days for thinking on sands that are run! But you are not just to me, Beppina. Let by-gones be by-gones. As for me, I am sure I am the last man in the world to wish to look back from a happy present to a miserable past. If we must be troubling ourselves with old accounts, that are settled and done with, I dare say your biography during those years would not be all a blank.”

Beppina, who had been chattering her nonsense in mere wantonness, as her scraps of old songs suggested to her, without the slightest meaning or intention of any sort, beyond getting a laugh out of them at worst, and at best provoking some little tender demonstration from her lover, could not understand his half-in-earnest crossness. Strong, however, in her own happy good humour, and not choosing, if other loves *were* to be alluded to, to plead guilty to a too disconsolate wearing of the willow during the period of Pippo’s separation from her, she replied to his last insinuation by saying:

“Oh! *my* biography, *Eccellenza!* If you want a rhyme to sum up that, here is one for you:—

‘Mother! I’m weary of waiting!’

Ah, my poor mother, Heaven rest her blessed soul! died long before I was old enough to have any recollection of her. But that makes no difference in the song. In my case it was ‘Aunt;’ that’s all the difference,—Aunt Assunta, you know. The song goes this way:—

‘Mother! I’m weary of waiting,
I’ve made up my mind!
Three suitors are dying to have me!
Now, pray be so kind
As to choose me the best of the **three**;
Come, mother, and see,
Which shall it be?
Which of the three?’

Daughter ! pray who are your sweethearts ?
 The horse-doctor's one,
 Then the fat druggist ; and lastly
 The notary's son.

But I was destined to a different fate, it seems. My young hopes were crushed in the bud. For this is what Aunt Assunta answered :—

‘ Daughter, they’re rogues all three !
 The horse-doctor’s one ;
 The druggist is worse than he ;
 Worst of all is the notary’s son !
 Daughter, be guided by me ;
 These rogues all three
 Are but laughing at thee !’

So you see, Pippo, my loves came to nothing. Three disappointments, all in one bunch, was hard for a poor girl to bear, wasn’t it? You saw what a skeleton the pining over my sorrows had reduced me to, when you deigned to come back to us. I hope I shan’t have a fourth, eh, Pippo?”

“ Which would affect you quite as profoundly as those others you sing of did, eh, *Beppina mia* ? ” said Pippo, recovering the tone of good humour, which the unlucky allusion of Beppina’s previous song had made him lose for a moment. “ No, my own love ! ” he continued, dreadfully tired of his evening’s love-making, and stifling a yawn ; “ no ; please heaven, a few more hours will put us both beyond the reach of disappointments.”

“ A few hours, indeed ; it must be shockingly late ; and I vow, Pippo, you are yawning ! ” pouted Beppina ; “ and I never was less sleepy in my life. But just hear this pretty song before you go. It is a favourite of mine. Listen to it, sir, and feel ashamed of yourself :—

‘ A dazzling mist comes o’er my sight,
 A yawning, weary, drowsy weight !
 Why are these idlers here to-night ?
 And why, oh why comes *He* so late ?

If that bright face were smiling by me
 No sleep, I'll swear, would e'er come nigh me !
 Could I but see that pleasant face
 Little I'd feel of drowsiness.

'The old clerk hobbled in just now
 And straight the cards began to shuffle
 While he and mother whispered low ;
 Lord ! how I yawned to hear him snuffle !
 But if that face were smiling by me
 No sleep, I'll swear, would e'er come nigh me !
 Could I but see that pleasant face,
 There'd be no yawning in the case.'

But as that is not the case with you, I'll send you home to bed now. But you wanted a merry song? Well, you shall have one for the last, before you go. Yes! as you say, I'm more given to laughing than crying. And this is the tune I like to laugh to: I trust it may please your Excellency.

'If thou hast left me
 Heartsore ; what then?
 If damsels be plenty,
 There's no lack of men !
 And though there were none—
 When all's said and done
 Are they worth such a coil made about them ?
 No, no !
 Let them go !
 Believe me, I *can* do without them !
 Oh yes, sir ! we can do without them !''

Just as Beppina was rattling off the above saucy *refrain*, and ending it in a merry laugh, which seemed fully to justify Pippo's declaration that laughing rather than weeping was her *forte*, they were interrupted by the sudden solitary stroke of a very powerful bell, which sounded as if it were close over their heads.

"The Misericordia bell!" cried Beppina, suddenly ceasing from her laugh, and rapidly crossing herself, as the sound so well known to every Florentine died away after booming out one heavy stroke. "Oh! this night too, of all nights in the year! One toll of the bell! It is some

sick person. But it must be a case of great urgency to send for the Misericordia to a sick person at this hour. Why, I declare it is near one o'clock!"

"The worst is that it is my week of service," said Pippo. "I must go. Good night! Good-bye for a few hours,—only a few hours, my own love. Ah! you won't sing that last song of yours to-morrow."

"Perhaps no, perhaps yes; who knows?" laughed Beppina, as she allowed him to take a kiss on her cheek. "Good night; God bless thee, my dear love!"

Old Laudadio and Signor Marradi had been startled out of their chat by the bell which, flinging its ominous summons very audibly over the entire city, was startlingly loud at the very short distance which separated Laudadio's garden from the Duomo. They both came in through the window, as Pippo was saying his good night.

"I wonder what it can be at this time of night!" said Signor Laudadio.

"I can tell you to-morrow, sir," answered Pippo, "for I am on service and must run off. Good night! Good night! *A rivederla dimani mattina!*"

And so saying he hurried off to the neighbouring oratory of the brotherhood to do his work of mercy, whatever it might be.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MISERICORDIA.

THE city, which an hour previously had been so full of light and life and bustle and music, was as profoundly quiet as on ordinary occasions, when Pippo hastened into the *Piazza del Duomo*, and presented himself at the oratory of the Misericordia; for Florence is orderly even in her rejoicing and merriment. Soon after midnight the fun is

over, the lamps die out, and the revellers, one and all, go quietly home to their beds.

The night was not dark ; for though the moon had fortunately not risen early enough to injure the effect of the illuminations, she was now sailing aloft through the pure purple of the cloudless summer sky ; and the towers and domes, so lately flaunting in the garish bravery of their holiday trim, were looking pale, melancholy, and repentant in the ghostly white light.

It was but a step from the little street in which the *cereria* was situated to the *Piazza del Duomo*, and Pippo was among the two or three first to arrive in obedience to the summons. They had to wait some little time before a sufficient number were assembled for the duty in hand—the removal to the hospital of a sick woman, who, it was feared, would not last out till morning, her malady having, it was stated, suddenly assumed an alarming character. The dwelling to which the Brethren had been summoned was in one of the most distant parts of the town, near the St. Nicholas Gate.

It was not very long before a sufficient number of the Brethren had assembled. But the attendance on that festival night was perhaps somewhat more slack than ordinary ; and it so happened that no member of superior rank to that of Pippo in the hierarchy of the Order was among those who answered the call. It became necessary, therefore, that he should act as Captain of the party about to start for the *Porta di San Niccolo*.

It is the duty of the Captain on these occasions to walk at the head of the procession ; to direct all its operations ; to exercise his discretion in leaving with the friends and relatives of the sick person to be removed, a small alms on behalf of the brotherhood, if such assistance shall appear to him to be needed ; and to superintend the changes of the bearers who carry the litter. It is also his duty to take care that there shall be in due readiness, in case of need, all the apparatus required for the last hurried shrift of a person *in extremis*—the crucifix, the candle, the breviary,

the holy oil, &c. All these tools for the due passing of a soul, according to the forms of the Romish faith, are deposited in a little box attached to the under part of the litter in front. One at least of the procession engaged on the errand of mercy is a priest, and he is ready to do his function in case of need. Furthermore, it is the duty of the Captain to see that the regulations of the brotherhood are strictly observed in regard to the dress and bearing of the party under his direction, and more especially in respect to their communications with the house to which their duty takes them. Their rule requires that a glass of cold water should be the utmost refreshment of any kind which any member may accept in the house or from the inmates of it; and still less, of course, may any other reward or remuneration be received. From persons in easy circumstances, indeed, when, as not unfrequently occurs, the services of the Misericordia are requested to remove an invalid, a remuneration is expected. But this must be made to the proper treasurer of the funds of the charity. The Brethren on service are prohibited from touching more than a glass of water, as much in a palace as in a hovel.

Fourteen of the Brethren had assembled, and one by one, as he arrived, had passed into the robing-room, and come out from it into the chapel enveloped in the long black gown reaching to the feet, and the peaked hood over the head, entirely concealing every feature save the eyes, which might be seen strangely gleaming through the holes cut for them in the cowl. Every man also had an immensely large broad-leaved hat hanging from his neck at the back of his shoulders. Thus enveloped and disguised, so as not to be recognisable by the most intimate friend, the band issued from the chapel after a short interval of devotion; and six of them, silently pairing themselves with reference to similarity of stature, raised to their shoulders one of the black covered litters belonging to the brotherhood, while the Captain, having looked to the shriving apparatus in the receptacle which has been described, placed himself at their head, and the rest disposed themselves two and two behind

the litter. And in this order, and in total silence, they started on their mission with that steady and uniform, but by no means slow step, which practice has made peculiar to the members of the Misericordia.

Of all the sights peculiar to the street life of Florence, there is perhaps none which strikes a stranger more forcibly than the passage of one of these convoys of the Brotherhood of Mercy. The whole thing is a bit of the life of the middle ages, cut out bodily from its original surroundings and transported into our own so wholly dissimilar times. The idea on which the institution reposes, the mode in which it is carried out, and the material and visible presentation of it, as seen in operation, are all strictly and essentially mediæval. Mercy and its works are, God be thanked! the monopoly of no age nor church, nor clime. It may, indeed, be permitted to us to hope, that the genuine feeling of the good Samaritan, consideration on the part of the strong and prosperous for their weaker and less fortunate brethren, and recognition of the duty of helpfulness, was at no period of the world's history more general than in our own. But we do our "works of mercy" in a different way, if not in a different spirit. The principle of the division of labour, increased activity, and schemes for the economising of time consequent upon this, have had their influence on our benevolence and our charity, as on every other department of social life. And like every other human product or arrangement these tendencies are not wholly beneficial. Instead of leaving our occupations or our families to don a black disguisement, and put our own hands to the work of mercy, we pay our quarterly subscription to a hospital; and an immeasurably greater amount of good accomplished by a similar quantum of self-sacrifice is the result. Works of mercy, no less than all other works, can be most efficiently and beneficially done by professional heads and hands specially trained to the purpose. The recipients of the mercy, it may safely be concluded, are entirely and largely benefited by the change in the modern practice. But the advantage of the other party—the doers of mercy—remains

to be considered. It may be open to a doubt—the admirers of the “ages of faith” would say that it admits of none—whether the good Samaritan would have been equally benefited in his own moral nature, if, instead of personally tending the waylaid stranger, he had simply paid his surgeon’s bill, without ever seeing him. But it must be remembered that this mode of looking at the matter does not include a view of all the circumstances of the case in question. There was a melo-dramatic element in those old world manifestations of sentiment, which did not take its rise from an altogether pure source, and did not fail in some degree to affect injuriously both those good works and the workers of them, to which it attached itself. To this has to be added the important difference between spontaneous self-originating compassion for an individual case, and mere membership, however voluntary and conscientiously assumed, of an established institution. And putting aside, as belonging to a much larger question, the radical and fatal taint inherent in a system of conduct based on the theory of a quid-pro-quo purchase of so much available merit for so much “work of mercy,” as per account;—there remains to be taken into consideration the inevitable tendency of such institutions as that in question to degenerate into routine, officialism, and formalism.

The old Florentine Misericordia, in the absence of more modern and more efficient means for performing the same services, does unquestionably a great amount of good. It is an overt and standing recognition of the worth, duty, and excellence of merciful helpfulness. The black gown and hood are a very striking and loud enforcement of the golden rule, not to let the one hand know what the other is doing,—not to be “seen of men.” *But* it is a very respectable thing in Florence to belong to the Misericordia.

At all events, whatever else it may be or may not be, the Misericordia is an exceedingly *picturesque* institution. Nothing indeed can, merely in itself, if robbed of all its associations, be more unpleasing to the outward eye than

one of those black, ominous-looking litters attended by its cortège of black-masked figures in their hideous peaked cowls. But, looked at sympathisingly, with all the associations, local and historical, belonging to it, one of those strange processions, seen in its due setting of antique streets and storied walls, defiling from the *Via della Morta** in the immediate neighbourhood of the brotherhood's oratory, or passing with its solemnly-swinging tramp across the piazza under the shadow of the tower of the old republic, has a singular power of transporting the imagination back to the days when such sights and institutions were a homogeneous part and parcel of the social life around them.

Especially is one of the Misericordia processions a striking object when encountered by a belated straggler returning from some ball or revel through the solitary and silent streets on a moonlight night. He is crossing, we will suppose, the wide open space between the west front of the cathedral and the baptistry, with the lilt of the last polka or the *motivo* of a favourite melody of Verdi running through his brain as he strolls homewards enjoying the delicious temperature of a southern summer night and the fantastically-beautiful effects of the moonlight on the marble columns, arches, and mouldings of the great church and the fairy-like Campanile. Suddenly from out the deep shadow cast by the huge flank of the cathedral emerges with swift and steady but silent step the all-black litter, with its all-black bearers and all-black followers. It comes out into the broad moonlight, a huge blot on the white pavement, ominous of suffering and sorrow; cuts across the mind of him who meets it under such circumstances with as sharp and incisive a contrast as that with which its dismal train blurs the fair pale face of the night, and passes on towards the hospital or the deadhouse, according to the need of its burthen.

* The street of the dead woman. It is so called in commemoration of the well-known romantic story of Ginevra degli Almieri, who passed along it in her shroud, when escaping from her premature tomb.

Pippo, leading his silent party in accordance with the instructions he had received at starting from the permanent official of the brotherhood, pursued his way towards the neighbourhood of Santa Croce, and thence, crossing the Arno by the *Ponte alle Grazie*, the first of the four bridges under which the river flows within the walls of the city, down the broad *Via de' Renai*, and so past the San Miniato gate, into the street leading to the *Porta San Niccolo*.

The region lying immediately beneath the shadow of the black and grim old tower which surmounts the St. Nicholas gate is the most squalid and unsightly of all Florence, and the inhabitants belong evidently and exclusively to the poorest class. The Brethren of the Misericordia are well acquainted with the district, for their visits in the wake of those of disease and death are frequent in proportion to the poverty of the district. The aspect of the *Borgo San Niccolo*, however, must not be imagined as at all resembling in excess of destitution the worst portions of our own great cities. No such extremity of misery and desolation exists in Florence as may be witnessed in London, Manchester, or Liverpool; still less is it marked by any of those features of lawlessness which characterise some of the districts inhabited by the "dangerous classes" of our towns. There are isolated criminals, but there are no dangerous classes at Florence. And the *Borgo di San Niccolo*, as well as any other of the poorest quarters of the city, may be traversed by anybody at any hour in perfect safety.

All was perfectly still as the Brethren passed down the street. Here and there a feeble glimmer of light in a chamber window marked a house, at the door of which the Misericordia might very probably have to set down their litter ere many days were over. But the procession now passed on without encountering a single soul, till it came very near the black old tower of the gateway. There, at the small narrow door of a three-storied house, stood an elderly woman, evidently on the look-out for the arrival of the brotherhood. A small lamp stood on the

ground in the narrow passage behind her, and showed the first step or two of a steep stair at the further end of it. On the window-sills of the third floor, and on a little shelf suspended below them, were several small plaster of Paris models placed to dry, which indicated that the tenant of that floor—or at least of that room—was a modeller.

The woman crossed herself, muttered a short prayer, and made a deep reverence as the train stopped and placed the litter on the ground before the door.

“What floor?” asked the Captain, in a low voice.

“Third floor; the bottom of the passage looking into the courtyard,” replied the woman, in the same low tone.

“The passage is narrow probably?” asked again the black-masked figure.

“It is something narrow, and the doorway is *very* narrow,” returned the woman.

The Captain turned to one of the bearers nearest him, and whispered a few words. The man addressed lifted the cover of the litter, and taking from it a pair of large and perfectly clean, but coarse and strong coverlets or counterpanes, proceeded to carry them up the staircase, followed by five of his companions. The Captain and the other members of the band remained below with the litter before the door. Of the six who had glided noiselessly up the narrow stair one after the other, two entered the chamber indicated to them, while the others stood in a line along the narrow passage outside the door. One black figure of those who had entered stepped up on either side to the head of the poor pallet bed on which the sick person was lying: a young girl, evidently in the last stage of consumption—a very common case!—more so, probably than is supposed by many, who hold the common but very erroneous opinion that pulmonary consumption is, if not peculiar, at least especially predominant in our own race and in our own latitudes.

The two mute figures exchanged a glance through the eye-holes in their black hoods, and one of them stooping over the sick girl, said in a low voice—

"Are you able to raise yourself, sister?"

"Hardly, I fear. I have become very much weaker latterly," replied a voice, barely audible to the man whose head hung over her.

"And perhaps moving makes you cough? Don't attempt it. We shall manage without any exertion on your part. Shall the good woman there come to arrange your dress before we move you?"

"That has been done in readiness. We have made the best preparation we could," replied the low hollow whisper, while the large and sunken, but still bright eyes cast a wistful and piteous glance at the hideously masked figure hanging over her.

Not a glance of terror, such as in any other country a poor sick girl might well have felt at the approach of two such ministers to her sick bed; for the aspect of the Brethren of the Misericordia is too familiar to every Florentine from his earliest years; the respect in which they are held and the confidence felt in their skilful kindness is too general, and among the poorer classes the idea that one day, sooner or later, it will probably fall to the lot of any one of them to be carried to the hospital in one of those well-known litters, is too much part and parcel of their minds for the dismal masquerading under which the brotherhood does its ministering to affect the imagination as it would elsewhere.

"Lie still, then, and make no exertion, and leave us to move you," replied the mask, in very gentle tones.

And then, with all the delicacy and gentleness of women, but with the strength and firmness of movement of men, the two proceeded with wonderful dexterity and adroitness to pass one of the coverlets beneath the light and emaciated figure of the sick girl, in which she was entirely wrapped. The other was then similarly slipped under her, so as to serve as a kind of sling in which to carry her down stairs. Little, however, as the movement caused by these arrangements had been, it produced an access of coughing, which seemed to threaten the possi-

bility that it might change the nature of the task to be performed by the Brethren. He who had previously spoken now pulled a small crucifix from his pocket, and placing it in her hands, stood aside to wait until the fit of coughing should have passed.

Fixed to the bare white wall at the head of the bed by a small nail, there was a coloured print of the Madonna of the Seven Sorrows; and when the black figure placed the crucifix in her hand, the sick girl pointed to this soiled and worn bit of paper, and motioned that it should be given her. The man at once comprehended her wish, and unfixing the picture from the wall, handed it to her.

Gradually the cough subsided, and then the four men outside were called into the room, and while each one took a corner of the counterpane, the other two placed themselves, one at the head the other at the feet, ready to give any assistance that might be needed in conveying the light burthen down the narrow stair.

It is a special rule of the Misericordia that the Brethren in attendance on a litter should so dispose themselves and should lift the large cover of the litter in such a manner as to shield the sick person about to be placed in it as much as possible from the curious gaze of the neighbours or of chance passengers in the street. And although at that hour of night there were no prying eyes abroad from which to guard their charge, the Brethren, as is usually the case with men acting in conformity to a prescribed form of routine in which the minutest details are provided for by unvarying rules, proceeded in exact accordance with their prescriptive usages.

In this manner the patient was laid softly and carefully in the litter by those who had brought her down, the large arched lid was closed over her, and the entire party prepared to start on their way to the great "Arch-hospital" of Santa Maria. As those of the Brethren who had remained below proceeded to lift the long poles on which the litter is carried to their shoulders, and the others in their turn formed themselves two and two behind it, one of

the latter whispered a few words to the Captain, who thereupon placed one of the number immediately in front of the litter. It was the duty of the brother so placed to keep a vigilant watch on the sick person in the litter, during the time of their passage through the city by lifting from time to time the front part of the covering. This precaution is taken when there is reason to fear that the object of their work of mercy may expire before the hospital is reached; and the object is to obviate the possibility of a death without the performance of the last rites in however hurried a manner. The person charged with this duty strikes three little blows on one of the poles of the litter if he sees any immediately alarming symptoms, and that is a signal to the bearers immediately to set down the litter on the ground.

In this order the procession commenced its return journey.

They passed up the *Via de' Renai*, recrossed the bridge, traversed for a short space the Lung' Arno, and thence reached the Piazza by the small street which runs at the back of the Uffizi. There they emerged once more into the full broad moonlight, which was casting a weird but yet beautiful light on the David of Michael Angelo and on the statues under the arches of the mighty Loggia di Orgagna. They were just passing the steps of the Palace of the Republic at the feet of the David, when the three ominous taps on the pole of the litter from the hand of the watcher in front caused the party suddenly to halt and gently place their burthen on the moonlit pavement.

Two of the bearers raised the cover of it, while the Captain, little doubting the cause of the halt, stooped down in front to take the articles needed for Roman Catholic ministrations *in articulo mortis* from their receptacle. When the great black cover was laid aside the cause which had led the brother on the watch to stop the litter was but too apparent.

There lay all white in the black framework of the litter, the slender figure of a young girl of from twenty to five-and-twenty years of age. The head was a little

raised on a small pillow, so that the moonbeams poured down on the wan and hollow but still beautiful features. The remarkably abundant auburn hair lay on either side of the face, almost covering the little pillow with its thick wavy tresses, and falling over the bust down to the waist. But in the midst between these rivers of hair, over the white dress and the coverlet, there ran a bright red stream, welling out with each pulsation from the heart, and draining away rapidly the ebbing life.

She had broken a blood-vessel, and the brother on watch at the head of the litter-bier had not stopped the progress of the convoy a moment too soon. It was a piteous sight the high-sailing serene moon and the meek stars looked down upon, as that pale slight figure, with upward-glancing eye and mild long-suffering expression on its tranquil features, lay there on its black death-bed bier, with those strange and dismal-looking faceless figures around her. The black ebony crucifix lay between the passive fingers of the long white slender hands upon her bosom; and but for the ghastly blood-river, that marred the white purity of the figure and its narrow bed enframed in black, it would be difficult to imagine the picture of a more tranquil and peaceful adieu to earth and the blue overarching sky, to which her eyes were upturned, than that death-bed on the broad white pavement of the Piazza.

There were no familiar voices around her to cause the last sounds which the dulling ear was capable of receiving to carry with them assurances of the affection for which that still pulsing heart had yearned so vainly during its pilgrimage! There were no dear hands to press for the last time those which had longed, oh! so wearily, so patiently, for the grasp of a beloved one! Strange repulsive-looking figures were around her, kindly indeed in intention, but awful-looking, and to the imagination and the eye scarcely human in the faceless hideousness of their disguise. But as in death, so it had been with the young heart then so near its rest in life. And the

goal she had at length reached she had been, as the reader knows, eagerly and long looking to.

So lay La Beata under the strong, clear moonbeam, exactly in front of the Misericordia captain, when he raised his head from seeking the articles needed, according to Romish practice, for the passing of a soul.

To her, Pippo in his disguise was of course entirely undistinguishable from any other of the black figures around her; but no second glance through the eye-holes of his cowl was needed to flash on his brain the entire facts of the sight before him.

The Piazza had been, since the Misericordia procession entered it, as silent and deserted as if no life existed within miles of it. But just as Pippo raised his head and caught the sight of that form and face which stamped itself indelibly on his brain for the rest of his mortal career, a couple of belated revellers crossed the far corner of the Piazza towards the *Via Calzainuoli*, while one of them,—his ear full of the melody, though thinking little of the sense of the words,—carolled out, in a clear jocund voice, Verdi's celebrated

“O Dio ! morir si giovane !”

They passed, little heeding so ordinary a sight as the Misericordia pursuing their avocation at the other end of the Piazza, and the voice died away in the distance. It supplied a commentary on the scene that was passing beneath his eyes, hardly needed to bring home to him the whole significance of it.

The things which he had taken from their box under the litter dropped from his hands on the pavement; and with a sudden movement he dragged from his head the cowl which concealed his features. But still he stood, staring with dilated eyes at the pale unaccusing face before him. As soon as the cowl was removed, the recognition was as instantaneous on the part of the dying girl as on his own. But voice was already gone from her, and the

power of the mind or of the muscles over her features had so far perished that, whatever her inward feeling may have been, her face did not change from its expression of calm tranquillity. And the result under the circumstances was to make it seem to his excited mind as if this meeting were expected by her, and mysteriously foreknown to her. But the shock of it gave her the power to raise her head forward an inch or two from the pillow, and to stretch out her two transparent hands for an instant towards him.

But he did not start forwards towards the head of the litter ;—he did not fling himself on his knees by the side of her ;—he did not seize that poor still beseeching hand in his ;—he did not attempt even now, in those last minutes of the eleventh hour, to utter that one word of love which the dying ears still yearned to hear. There was no other expression in his face than terror—extreme and abject terror.

This, then, was the meeting of which she had been so certainly assured ! Here, then, was the reading of the dream which had foreshown her to him, calling him from his marriage to her death-bed. And those fatal hands still beckoned him away ! Was she, then, the embodiment of the curse which rested on him for having put his hand to the plough and looked back ;—for having sacrilegiously deserted his ecclesiastical career ? Where—where should he escape from those pursuing eyes and from those fatal arms that stretched themselves towards him even from a bier ?

After gazing thus horror-stricken and as it were benumbed by superstitious terror, and cowering beneath the avenging spectre of his evil conscience for a few moments, which to him seemed many minutes, Pippo turned and fled across the deserted Piazza and through the silent streets, till, hardly knowing what he did, he found himself in his own studio.

She, when he thus turned and ran from her, for a moment followed him by a slight movement of the arms and head. But the convulsive effort she had made to

raise herself under the strong excitement of that strange meeting had caused an increased hæmorrhage from the lungs, and had exhausted the last remnant of vitality in her frame; and she fell back on the pillow, even as he rushed conscience driven across the Piazza, at peace and at rest at last.

* * * * *

Few words were spoken among the brothers of the Misericordia who had witnessed this strange scene. Their duty was plain enough. The destination to which they were bound was changed;—that was all! So they proceeded to do the work of mercy, required of them by the circumstance, in the silence enjoined by their regulations, leaving commentary and question on what they had witnessed to a fitter opportunity.

Besides, strange as the circumstances were which had passed before them, they in a great degree told their own tale, intelligibly to most of those men who—like the widow Sappi—had the experience of some fifty years of life in the world. For it is an old story that has been told here;—the old story, sir!—truly the very oldest of old stories;—so that your man of the world, who has witnessed one scene thereof, has little difficulty in divining the antecedents and sequel of the tale.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CAMALDOLI.

HIGH up among the beech and pine forests that still clothe that part of the Apennine which looks down on and encloses the Dante-sung valley of the Casentino is the celebrated monastery of Camaldoli. A visit to it constitutes a frequent and favourite excursion for strangers who prolong

their stay at Florence sufficiently far into the summer months, to be sure that winter has departed at length from the mountain tops; for the climate of Camaldoli is as rigorous as that of Switzerland. But in summer or autumn the spot is not only exceedingly beautiful, but exquisitely delicious from its temperature to those who come from the blaze of the lower valleys.

As usual, the monks who selected this spot for their retirement chose admirably well. While the neighbouring districts of the Apennines are barren rock and arid sand for many a mile, the region around Camaldoli is a sylvan paradise of meadow, wood, and water.

Admiring sons of Mother Church, her institutions, and her austerities, would have it believed that this and so many other similar sites were selected by the pious hermits, who, in most instances, were the first founders of such establishments, with no eye either to their picturesque beauty or to the more solid advantages they promised, but solely for the sake of their remoteness from the living world, its concerns, and its temptations, the rigour of their winter climate, and the profoundness of their solitude. But less docile minds are apt to imagine that, at least in these latter days, the communities located in these places both know well, and take good care to draw from them all the means of wealth and comfortable living which they are capable of supplying.

Now the good fathers at Camaldoli, a branch of the great Carthusian Order, may be cited as an example in support of either of the above theories; for their establishment and their community is divided into two parts, in one of which the former, while in the other the latter is very consistently carried out.

The principal and lower monastery is a huge irregular pile of buildings situated at that point of the mountain's height where the upper pine forests cease, and the lower and more mildly beautiful beech woods begin. It is surrounded by the loveliest wood-encircled meadows, ranged over by abundant herds, well sheltered from the blasts

that even in summer vex the upper Apennine, and well supplied with every comfort necessary for a studious and healthful life. The inmates live there in community and in the enjoyment of such society as may be found in other monastic establishments.

They are the lords of a very considerable and productive territory around, above, and beneath them. A productive and well-tilled garden lies close under the convent walls. A well-stocked dairy farm, lying in beautifully green slopes, such as the lower valleys could not show, fenced around and sheltered by thick masses of beech forest, forms a striking oasis of smiling fertility in the midst of the surrounding barrenness of the Apennine. But the appendage of which the good fathers are most proud, and which the worthy 'padre forestieraio'—he to whom the duty of receiving strangers is assigned—used some years since to point out to visitors as a miracle of art and science, is a very simple saw-mill, worked by a little torrent streamlet, which comes tumbling down from the upper Apennine close to the convent wall. Nor is it without reason that the good fathers make a pet of their saw-mill, standing two or three of them together, as they will, watching its untiring operation with infinite zest and satisfaction; for its gratuitous labours add infinitely to the profits of their forest property on the mountain above them. Some of the finest pine timber in the world grows on the western Apennine slope above Camaldoli. Better means of transport are needed to make these forests yet more valuable. But, even as matters are, or were rather, masts for the British navy have been furnished from the pine-woods of Camaldoli. Once on a time the monastery possessed far more extensive tracts of forest than it now owns, but some it lost at the time of the French invasion, and some have been since taken from the monks on the ground of mismanagement of property too large for them. Below, in the valley which runs down from the gorge, in which the convent is niched, into the rich and fertile Casentino, the disciples of St. Romuald possess more than one good farm, which supply

the fathers with corn, and oil, and wine;—the latter of very generous and excellent quality. Their lowland possessions supply them also with an article very useful for fast-days—a haricot bean of such specially excellent quality, that a yearly present of them is sent by the convent to the holy father at Rome; as the ‘padre forestieraio’ does not fail to inform his guests. In short, the life at Camaldoli is not an intolerable one.

At the other branch of the institution all is very different. The *Sagro Eremo*,* as it is called, is situated far up the mountain, very near the topmost crest of the Apennine, from which it is said both seas, the Adriatic and the Mediterranean, are visible. The climate is most severe. The *Eremo* consists of a number of small isolated cottages, together with a church surrounded by an enclosing wall, outside which the wind howls almost ceaselessly through the surrounding pine forests. The life there is as different from that of the lower community as is the nature of the locality. The inmates are not coenobites, but essentially hermits. There is no common life, no common refectory, no society, no communication of one recluse with his brother. All conversation is forbidden. The human voice is heard only in the constant services in the chapel. Even visitors are directed to speak below their breath while they remain within those dreary precincts. The wall in each isolated cell is furnished with a sort of trap-door; and through it is passed the inmate’s daily ration of bread and vegetables, no animal food, except on one or two days in the year, forming any portion of their diet. Here, at least, if heaven can be won by voluntary abstinence from every material comfort, every social enjoyment, and every exercise of the affections, with which an all-bountiful Creator has thought fit to endow his creatures, are men who are earnest in striving to merit it.

It should be mentioned that within the enclosure there is a very considerable library well furnished with works of

* Holy Hermitage.

historical as well as ascetic theology. The books may be freely taken by the inmates to their cells, each one of which contains, in addition to a sleeping-room, an oratory and a "study." But the fact is—and it supplies a remarkably significant commentary on the results most likely to be produced on the human intellect by the life here led—that no use whatever is made of the volumes.

The same curious and instructive moral may be read, perhaps even more remarkably set forth, in the state of the little garden attached to each of the isolated hermitages within the wall of the *Sagro Eremo*. Every one of these dreary, bleak-looking, stone-built dwellings has in front of it a small plot of ground enclosed within a low stone wall, which is entirely at the disposition of the inmate. There in solitude, but in the complete exercise of the right of uncontrolled ownership, the hermit is at liberty to indulge in the primeval pleasure of creating and embellishing a garden. Horticulture, it must be admitted, is carried on somewhat at a disadvantage at this altitude among the howling blasts that almost continually sweep the pine forests in their passage across the Apennine from one to the other sea. Still human care and labour have embellished yet more unpromising localities. A morsel of well-tended turf and a few such hardy flowers as could brave the climate would gladden the eye, would impart a certain charm of home-like feeling to the cheerless dwelling, and, above all, would supply the altogether invaluable boon of occupation to the recluse. It is the one solitary concession to the imperious needs of one important constituent part of human nature, made by the rules of the founder; and it seems almost incredible that men situated as these solitaries are should neglect to profit by it. Yet such is almost if not quite invariably the fact. There are the little enclosures utterly neglected and uncared for, adding by their weed-grown and desolate-looking appearance a feature the more, and a very striking one, to the absolutely miserable aspect of the place. We know that criminals, whose whole lives have been dissipated in idleness, clamour for the in-

dulgence of being allowed to work, after having been subjected for a while to the terrible effects of solitude and enforced inaction; but these holy men will neither employ the mind in study nor the body in the most pleasing of all bodily labour. One would have thought that these restricted little patches of earth would have exhibited the results of a superabundance of labour and affectionate care. One would have expected that each pebble and each blade of grass would show that it had been the object of human care and thought; but all is barren and desolate, as are the lives passed in this desolate place. It is very strange—appalling even—when it is considered how small a mistake in the road may lead men to brutishness who fancy that they are travelling on the path towards super-human sanctification.

The inhabitants of this fearful torture-place are of three classes. They consist of novices, who are expected to prove the earnestness of their call to the monastic life by one or two years' residence at the *Eremo*, before they are permitted to descend to the comparatively luxurious life of the monastery below; or, secondly, of monks sent thither from the latter establishment as a measure of punishment; or, thirdly, of men who, by a permanent residence there, hope either to acquire a title to the rewards supposed to await especial and extra sanctity, or to wipe out from the eternal judgment-roll the record of some deed, which they can never more hope to erase from that of their own conscience.

A visitor to this melancholy place, aware of these facts, is tempted, when in the chapel he has all the members of the uncommunicating community before him, to speculate on the cause, among the above three, to which the presence there of each of the uncowed heads before him is due. And in most cases the faces tell their own tale with sufficient clearness to enable him to make a shrewd guess at the truth.

There are the young novice faces, healthy and florid-looking for the most part, heavy, stolid, and animal in type and development almost invariably. It is difficult to imagine the causes which can have led such idiosyncrasies to assume

the habit and pronounce the monastic vows. It would seem as if a sluggish temperament, phlegmatic in its indifference to the temptations of the world, and alive mainly to an aversion to laborious exertion, were the incitements to a 'vocation' most widely in operation. Then the second category—the hermits on penal sentence—represented perhaps by two or three out of the entire number, are more difficult to be recognised. What can be imagined to be the misconduct thus punished? Is it, mayhap, likely that any such condemnations are to be attributed rather to the results of the jealousies, bickerings, and hatreds which are sure to be found in more or less virulence among the members of a community in which better subjects of interest are scanty, than to any other cause? The third class, again, are for the most part marked by characteristics legible enough. At least mere animalism is not the type of this category. Fanaticism, of any sort, mischievous and degrading as it may be, has always at least so much of respectability as strength and earnestness can confer. There is more variety, too, among the individuals of this class. There is the Frá Angelico sort of head of the candidate for high spiritual honours, with mild passionless eyes, high-peaked narrow head, mean undeveloped brow, and thin lips, a temperament untempted by passion, incapable of real virtue, a selfish spiritual miser, always hoarding in hope to accumulate a 'plum' in the stock that appears to him the safest. Then there is the richer-natured type of those shipwrecked ones, who have struggled out of the deep waters to this dreary shore, to use it as a refuge and a purgatory. Among these may be marked the impotency of macerations of the body to still the voices of undying memory; the possibilities of rebellion yet lurking in eyes flashing from beneath a cowl, and sometimes the calm of victory won after internecine struggle.

Some ten or twelve years ago a couple of Englishmen, thus exercising their skill in physiognomy, marked especially one among the shaved heads in that little chapel, which they fancied they could assign to the category to which it

belonged with considerable certainty. He was a tall man, who had evidently once been handsome, and, indeed, was so still, as far as beauty may be held to be compatible with hollow eyes, sunken temples, and emaciated cheeks. He was still in the prime of his years ; but it was easy to read on that face, that some lightning blast of crime, or misfortune, or both, and of anguish certainly, had passed over and indelibly scathed it. At a certain point in the service he stepped from his seat to the foot of the altar, and there prostrate, with his forehead touching the marble step and arms spread to their full extent, in such a manner as to form together with his head and body the figure of a cross, remained for many minutes. Then thrice striking his forehead against the pavement, he arose and returned to his seat. The curiosity of the visitors was sufficiently excited to induce them, being still at the *Eremo*, to enter the chapel again during the afternoon service. And again they witnessed the same acts performed by the same penitent.

The whole bearing of the man was so remarkable, that they were induced to ask of the monk appointed to receive and act as guide to strangers, and who for this purpose has an express dispensation from the rule of silence, what was the name of him who had so excited their interest. He was Frá Simone, they were told ; and it was added that he had been a voluntary inmate of the *Eremo* ever since his admission to the Order. Of course, it was impossible there to push their inquiries any further ; but on returning to the quarters, in which they had been hospitably received at the innless little town of Prato Vecchio, in the Casentino valley, at the bottom of the mountain on which the monastery stands, they spoke of Frá Simone and his remarkable appearance, and strange devotions, and found that his story was well known to their landlady.

The tale which has been narrated in the preceding pages is the result of the gossip's chronicle obtained from that source.

For Frá Simone, as will have been already divined by the reader, was no other than he who had been "known in the world" as Filippo Lonari.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLIGHT.

ON reaching his own chamber, after his flight from the Piazza on that memorable night of 23rd of June, Pippo passed the hours until the time at which the city gates are open in a state of superstitious terror and remorseful anguish bordering on insanity.

It was characteristic of the nature of the man, and of the fatal destruction of every principle of true and natural morality in his soul, which had resulted from the lessons of his early training, that his evil conscience, even when awakened to avenging activity by events that irresistibly appealed to its powerful and never-failing ally the imagination, lashed him indeed with scorpion thongs, but lashed him awrong. It was not the infamous desertion of the hapless victim of his heartlessness, selfishness, and base worldliness that weighed upon his soul; it was not even the sin of which he had been guilty in his connexion with her. The first, according to the teaching of a creed which had demoralised him sufficiently to render such teachings credible to him, was in truth the performance of a duty. The second was a sin easily to be wiped out by certain due and prescribed appliances. It was the unpardonable enormity of having abandoned his sacred calling, of having 'put his hand to the plough and looked back,' that filled his mind with intolerable terrors. Nothing so fatally dwarfs the intellect as systematized and continued misdirection of the moral sentiments. Much learning and large and varied acquirements may be found coexistent with such depravation often enough, but a large and healthy development of the intelligence never. In the fatality which, as it seemed to him, rendered it impossible for him to escape from the connexion he had formed with La Beata, and made that the means of destroying the schemes of worldly prosperity and

advancement so near their accomplishment, Pippo saw only the providential punishment of his first sacrilegious sin. Before that final catastrophe a certain amount of superstitious fear connected with La Beata's claim upon him had, as we have seen, worried him and made him nervous; and when the terrible shock of that fearful meeting in the open piazza, under the overarching vault of heaven, palsied him with sudden terror, it never occurred to him that by preserving his incognito beneath the all-concealing hood of the Misericordia, nothing need ever be known, even to the dying girl herself, of any relationship between the brother of the Misericordia and the patient. To his excited imagination it seemed that the providentially timed apparition of La Beata to claim him, so few minutes before she was to quit the scene for ever, and so few hours before the accomplishment of his marriage—to claim him with those outstretched arms reaching towards him from her bier—made the consummation of his plans hopeless and impossible. He felt detected and exposed before God and man. The whole story of his wickedness and its chastisement would in a few hours be known to the whole city, and the hypocrisy which had led him to assume the holy office of a Brother of the Confraternity of Mercy, would be seen by all men to have been made the means of his detection and punishment.

His whole mind, therefore, as far as the shattered and overbalanced powers of it could be said to act at all, was bent on escaping from the imminent exposure and contumely which awaited him, and ulteriorly from the punishment due to his dereliction of his holy calling. For the first purpose nothing short of immediate flight from the city could avail. Florence is not as London or Paris, in the immensity of which it is more easy for a man to disappear and be hidden from all eyes that ever before looked on him, than in any other part of earth's surface. It is impossible for a Florentine to remain hidden in Florence, but it was not possible to leave the city unquestioned till the gates should be open in the morning; and the few hours which

intervened between the scene in the Piazza and the dawn were passed by him in an agony of feverish impatience and an attempt to determine on some plan of conduct. Whither was he to betake himself? The world was all against him—every world! his original ecclesiastical connections, his subsequent friends in the world of art, and now that respectable portion of society to which he had vainly hoped to ally himself! Where was he to find a refuge? where hide himself from the contempt and the hostility of the world? where find means and opportunity to reconcile himself with heaven?

It is to men whose faults, follies, or misfortunes have brought them to this pass that the cloister offers itself as an invaluable haven. It supplies exactly everything that the needs of their case require. When among sterner Protestant communities nothing is left to the despairing and the weak save physical suicide, more indulgent Catholicism offers the milder measure, as it is deemed, of merely moral suicide instead. To the irremediably bankrupt in hope, in character, in fortune, in energy, in reputation, the cloister assuredly does offer that which no other institution yet invented among men can supply. How admirable, then, the provision! it is cried; how lamentable—how unpardonable the hiatus in the system which has destroyed a shelter so blessed! But may not mercy to the thousands who would fall if their every energy were not taxed to keep themselves on their legs, dictate the refusal of this all-covering mercy to those who have fallen? Is it well that to all who find the path of life laborious and difficult it should be loudly declared and shown that those who refuse to walk in it are to be carried? Is it not better to trust to the eternally ordained governance of Providence also in this matter, in the full assurance that moral causes produce their normal effects to beneficent ends, and that it is a short-sighted wisdom which seeks to reverse the decrees pronounced by their legitimate operation? Of course the conclusions to which such considerations would lead are applicable to other social arrangements besides monastic

institutions, and it may be that the world will some day see wisdom in the unreserved acceptance of them. At all events it would seem to be clear thus far that those social systems which have gone furthest in accepting such principles, which have most courageously determined on allowing the Juggernaut car of moral law to pursue its course without interference, and which have advanced furthest towards seeing that in this department also whatever is right, have, in fact, nursed fewer weaklings to be crushed by those Juggernaut wheels, and are themselves walking erect in the van of human advance and improvement.

Pippo Lonari was the product of a system which acted in every respect to the utmost of its power on diametrically opposite notions and principles. To him the cloister offered a haven of escape from the shipwreck to which the navigation of his bark had legitimately led; and gradually, during those few hours of terror, despair, and anguish, a clear determination to seek that haven in the mountain solitude of Camaldoli formed itself in his mind.

As soon, therefore, as the hour had arrived at which it was possible for him to leave the city he slunk suspiciously through the empty morning streets to the *Porta Santa Croce*, and felt, with a sensation of relief, that as he passed through it he was leaving Florence, its men and women, its aims, and hopes, and fears behind him for ever. Once clear of the city, he sped along the road leading to the upper valley of the Arno as if he had been pursued in bodily shape by the avenger, whom in reality he carried with him in his own breast. For many hours he held on his course, breasting at speed the long ascent which climbs the high ground that separates the Valdarno from the Casentino, and conscious of a mitigation of the terror that spurred him onwards as the rapidly rising road brought him out of the thickly-inhabited valley into the solitude of the open mountain. After many hours of walking under the now burning sun, absolute exhaustion compelled him to throw himself down in the shade at the foot of a roadside chestnut-tree. He then reflected that he had not

tasted food that day, and that without it it would be impossible for him to continue his route, or reach the yet distant monastery. There is a little solitary roadside inn at the top of the mountain pass, which was a few hundred yards from the spot where he was lying, and which could supply him with the food that was so necessary to him. But it now occurred to him, for the first time, that he had never thought of putting any money in his pocket ere leaving his studio. He had thought of nothing but headlong flight. He had, however, his watch in his pocket, which, as he said bitterly to himself, he should assuredly never need again, and he determined to ask for breakfast at the inn, and then tender his watch as security for payment, explaining that he had accidentally lost his purse. Having eaten and slept afterwards, though very disturbedly, for a couple of hours, he felt able to continue his journey. His way now led him down from the altitude he had gained into the valley of the Casentino to the little town of Prato Vecchio.

It was strange how strong a reluctance he felt to enter the remote little town. In vain he told himself that it was impossible that any tidings of him, or his affairs, or his flight should have reached the place. There were human eyes there on every side, and it was intolerable to him to feel that they were resting on him; yet it was necessary for him to make up his mind to enter the town, for the infant Arno, there some half-dozen miles from its source in the flank of Monte Falterona, had to be crossed, and the only means of doing so was by the bridge of Prato Vecchio. It was the cool evening hour too of the close of the long summer day, and all the population of the little town was, after Italian fashion, in the streets, the men strolling up and down the little piazza, or lounging in front of the cafés, the women sitting in gossiping groups at the doors of their houses; nevertheless the ordeal must be braved, and that at once, for the miserable, conscious-stricken man had traversed more than thirty miles that day, and was well-nigh exhausted; indeed, nothing less

than the goading of such a passion of terror and remorse as that which drove him on could have enabled him to accomplish the feat he had performed, and seven more miles had yet to be traversed before he could throw himself down at the convent door; these seven miles, moreover, were by far the most difficult part of the journey. Hitherto he had traversed a good and well-made, though mountainous road, but there is none such from the valley of the Casentino to the high lying mountain solitude of Camaldoli. A mere track, barely good enough to be used as a bridle-path for the little surefooted mountain horses and the charcoal-burners' mules, leads over the dreary and barren mountains which intervene between the monastery and this part of the valley, and are changed in character to woodland verdure only in the immediate neighbourhood of Camaldoli. It is a path, moreover, hardly to be found by one traversing it for the first time, impossible even to find the beginning of it by which the traveller must quit the little town. It was absolutely necessary, therefore, for Pippo not only to expose himself to the observation of the people, but to communicate with some among them in search of a guide.

Haggard and foot-sore, with down-looking hang-dog mien, he limped across the bridge into the town, and up the quaint old-fashioned little street, with its low-browed colonnades on either side, under which the women and children were gathered, enjoying the evening breeze from the mountains, chattering in groups, and making remarks, as he felt, on him and his woe-begone appearance, as he painfully dragged himself over the flagstones up the middle of the street, casting stealthy, suspicious glances on either side as he went, in search of some one of whom he would venture to seek the information he required. He thus passed through the entire street till he came to the little open piazza at the end of it. There, at the further end of the open space, he saw a couple of charcoal-burners engaged in binding a quantity of empty sacks on the pack-saddles of two mules. It was to be presumed that they were bound for the mountain, and as, of course, their

business took them to the forest, it was probable that they were going in the direction of Camaldoli, and would at all events know the way thither. To these men, therefore, Pippo, after some hesitation, made up his mind to address himself. He learned that they were, in fact, on the point of starting for the forests on the other side of the crest of the Apennine in the neighbourhood of the *Sagro Eremo* above Camaldoli, so that their way was the same as his to within about a mile of the end of his journey. Pippo told them that he was on his way to visit a brother, who was a member of the confraternity at the monastery: that his means had not allowed him to make the journey otherwise than on foot; that he had not been aware of the distance, and was, therefore, pretty nearly knocked up, but still determined to reach the convent that night. The men made no objection to his accompanying them, and after a few minutes' delay he again set forward to climb the mountain. It is impossible to imagine a more dreary and desolate track than that which crosses this part of the Apennine. The barrenness of the mountains, from which all the upper soil has been carried away by a thousand rills, turned into torrents by every heavy rain, to form the slowly rising plain beyond Pisa, is such that not even a blade of grass can grow on wide districts of them: and the naked surface of the friable schistous soil, varying from sand to slate-colour, looked weird and ghastly in the cool white moonlight, as Pippo limped wearily and painfully in the rear of the two gaunt black figures and the two mules with their black burthen of empty sacks. Nevertheless, it was better to have to make that journey under the cool light of the moon than under the blaze of the summer sun. The utter solitude, too, of the region he was traversing was acceptable and reassuring to the fugitive. But the most potent anodyne to agonizing thoughts and spiritual terrors was sheer exhaustion and bodily suffering. In such natures as that of Pippo corporeal present pain will always, by its superior claims on the attention, divert the mind from mental suffering; and as he struggled onwards,

doubting whether his strength would last to carry him to his destination, his imagination left all other subjects to fix itself on ideas of simple rest. What eye could follow him into the desolate solitudes he was now traversing? He almost felt as if repose and food would have sufficed to procure him complete contentment. At length the party reached the spot where their roads were to separate, but the rest of the way to the convent presented no difficulties. It was on the outer edge of the oasis of verdure and fertility, amid which the convent was placed, and thence to the building itself a good road had been constructed through the beechwoods, and along the edges of pasture fields, by the monks themselves. When the charcoal-burners, therefore, had bidden him good night and left him to pursue their way to the upper part of the mountain, he had only to follow this clear path for somewhat less than a mile.

But it was by that time late; long past the early monastic hour of closing gates and retiring each man to his cell, to make the most of the short hours allowed for sleep by the rules of the order. Pippo staggered up to the great gate of the building, absolutely reeling with exhaustion from his long fast and from fatigue. He pulled the chain hanging by the side of the door, which sent a clanging peal through the silent and re-echoing corridors within that startled him, and then flung himself on the flag-pavement before the gate. It was some little time before the lay brother, who acted as porter, was sufficiently roused from his sleep to come to the door in answer to his summons; and when at length he opened it the utterly exhausted traveller had fallen asleep as he lay on the flag-stones at the gate. The lay brother who opened the door manifested no surprise at this condition of the tardy applicant for admission. He had probably witnessed similar arrivals before in the course of his experience. He held his lantern down to the sleeping man's face and roused him from his already deep lethargy with some difficulty. To him Pippo only expressed, in the

fewest possible words, his urgent need of repose and food, and the white-robed venerably-bearded figure as laconically bade him enter, placed a modicum of bread and wine before him, indicated a sleeping-place like those used in soldiers' guard-rooms, and then left him to return to his own cell.

Due report was made after the early matin service in the choir, of the arrival during the night; but Pippo's sleep lasted for several hours after that, and the good monks did not disturb it. But when he waked, instead of accepting the breakfast of bread and water offered to him and going on his way, as many a belated traveller across those mountains, after a night's hospitality at the convent, did in the common course of things, he requested to be brought to the prior. He was taken to a cell in no respect differing from the others on either side of it, and was received there by a monk altogether undistinguished either by costume or mode of life from all the others in the community. The old man listened with an apparent absence of surprise or emotion to the tale Pippo poured forth, curious enough to mark;—listened with the calm and attentive air with which a physician, long accustomed to such statements, listens to the case of his patients; and having heard, he judged that the case was one to which treatment according to their system of moral pathology was clearly applicable.

In his communication with the prior Pippo did not enter into any of the particulars of his story, or of the troubles which made him wish for the shelter of a cloister, nor would the monk have wished him to do so. All this would be matter to be spoken of in the confessional. But there were cases in which it was better not to know the antecedent histories of those who sought to break off entirely and for ever all connexion with their former life. In general terms Pippo accused himself of being a grievous sinner, making it clear, however, that they were *sins* not *crimes*, which drove him from the world, and that he had in no way made himself obnoxious to the laws. He professed himself wholly and irrecoverably disgusted with and weary of the

world, and determined to dedicate his remaining years to penitence and prayer and the endeavour to make his peace with God. He avowed having in early youth been educated for the church, and showed the prior that his attainments were such as to justify him in aspiring, when the term of his noviciate should be passed, to enter the order as a clerk. The result of his conference with the prior was that he was at once received into the monastery, and in due course, as soon as the necessary formalities could be gone through, and the requisite authorisations obtained, was admitted to the noviciate, and finally into the order. As a novice, he had, according to rule, been sent to pass the accustomed time at the *Sagro Eremo*, and he never left it again.

It has often been considered surprising that on occasions when revolutions or other extraordinary occurrences have afforded to the inmates of convents the opportunity of returning to the living world from their cloister, so few have ever been willing to avail themselves of the chance. It might be supposed that in many, if not in the majority of cases, the impulse which had induced a man to seek the shelter of a cloister would be transient; that the moral suicide committed in a moment of despair would be repented of when too late; but an abundantly sufficient number of examples have occurred, and on record, to prove that the rule is otherwise. In such a case as that of Filippo Lonari, for instance, the ordinary experience which the world has of the motives, resolves, and repentances of such men would assuredly lead to the expectation that his convent vocation would be short-lived; yet it was not so. It would seem as if there were some law in operation which renders him who has once lived a monastic life consciously unfit for any other. As the light of day is intolerable to the eyes of prisoners who have long been immured in dungeons deprived of it, so the monk seems to shrink from the active life beyond his convent wall.

Pippo might at all events have at any time left the *Sagro Eremo* to return to the convent at Camaldoli and its

comparative luxury and ease; but having once gone up that melancholy looking steep paved path amid the thick and gloomy pine forest which ascends from the monastery to the hermitage, he never retraced the road. It was about three years after his reception into the order that he attracted the observation of the two English visitors, as has been related, and he lived only some five years after that. The shock that he had undergone produced, as it would seem, a permanent and indelible effect upon his mind; and it may be doubted whether the life at the *Sagro Eremo* was calculated to restore it to tone and health. The tranquillity, security, religious exercises, and quiet companionship incidental to ordinary monastic life might have tended to do so, but the terrible solitude, the gloomy character of the melancholy, ever-moaning, pining woods, which shut him in from the world, even the physical effects of the ascetic lenten diet, all contributed probably to increase the morbid condition of his mind. Nor was his idiosyncrasy one likely to offer much resistance to the effect of the influences in operation within and around him. The combination of sacerdotal training with the artistic temperament was not a happy one, or calculated to encourage the growth of intellectual stamina, or contribute to any tolerably healthy balance of the faculties; a system and a combination which dwarfed and distorted the moral sentiments, discouraged the judgment, misled the conscience, fostered and inflamed the imagination, sharpened the æsthetic faculties, and habituated the mind to subject itself to the influences of them and to no others, was admirably adapted to aid the development of a selfish heartless worldling into an always equally selfish fanatic, with an intellect reeling under the effect of the one ever-present fixed idea, of struggling to escape from the imminent danger of eternal torment. Assuredly Pippo—or Frá Simone, as he should now be called—would hardly have been pronounced to be of sound mind during the eight years of his residence at the *Sagro Eremo* by an intelligent physician; but his condition was not exposed to the judgment of any such, and those under

whose eyes his life was passed saw only in it evidence of high and edifying degree of sanctity. His observation of the utmost austerity of the monastic rule was, at all events, most exemplary. His self concentration appeared to be absolute and entire. Not even on the rare occasions when intercommunication between the inmates of the *Eremo* is permitted as a festival indulgence was he ever known to avail himself of the licence. Save in frequent confession he held no intercourse whatever with any human being. Save in the offices of the choir his voice had never been heard within those silent walls. On the two or three high festivals in the year on which the hermits are permitted to feast together on some modicum of animal food, he never either joined 'the festal board' or made any addition to his usual pittance of bread and vegetables. In the chapel his daily practice has already been described. Beside the four or five daily services in the chapel he repaired daily for solitary devotion to the little oratory formed out of the cell which tradition points out as that in which the sainted founder, St. Romuald, lived and died. His body under this discipline became fearfully emaciated, and a hectic fever shone with a baneful light in the two large hollow eyes that gleamed from under his cowl. Less than all this uninterruptedly continued for eight years, would have sufficed to merit and attain a reputation among the brotherhood for a high degree of sanctity. And when at last the once powerful and stalwart frame, still in the very midst of what should have been the prime of life, gave way, and the attenuated fever-worn body was evidently near the hour of its dissolution, a knot of the elders of the silent family gathered round the bare board bed on which the evidently dying man was laid, for the edification to be found in witnessing so holy a death, and to be the witnesses and chroniclers of any such miraculous manifestations as might not improbably be anticipated on such an occasion.

Many and various are the legends of death-bed miracles, revelations, and visions preserved in the records of the *Sagro*

Eremo; nor will it seem otherwise than quite in the natural course of things that they should be so to any one at all conversant with the modes in which the body and its conditions operate upon the mind, and with the process by which the latter may become diseased by restricting its sphere of operation to one single ever-recurring circle of ideas. Enlightened science would agree with the theory of monastic asceticism, so far, at least, as to admit that the visions which the latter deems to be the reward of persevering in a diet of dry bread and green vegetables, are likely enough to be the result of such a régime, and that the discipline which is considered by the great doctors of monkish devotion to be the best recipe for changing the mind, is at all events likely to unhinge it.

And the death-bed of Frá Simone was not without its visions, though it was difficult even for the bystanders—who were perfectly convinced of his eminent sanctity—to consider them of an edifying kind. It had to be admitted that the fiend was permitted to fight hard for the high prize of so holy a hermit's soul. And the proof of the final discomfiture of the evil one had to be found in the ultimate state of quiescence that immediately preceded death, and followed the exhaustion of both mind and body. In truth, the agony of that death-bed was a terrible one, and the visions which haunted it were but the intensified forms of the thoughts that had been ever present to the mind of the miserable recluse for the last eight years. He still saw those white arms stretching out towards him from the black Misericordia bier under the moonlight in the Piazza at Florence. There had been no hour of his life since that night in which he had *not* seen them. In the chapel, even as prostrate before the altar he bent his forehead against the marble of the pavement; in the midnight sleepless hours of his cell, while the wind among the pine forests wailed its weird and fitting accompaniment to his imaginings; in the feverish dreaming of his short and fitful sleep, the image which that instant had burned in upon his brain was never absent from him. During eight years, amid

the anguish of constant terror, he had striven by such means as his light suggested to him—by maceration, by fasting, by almost unceasing repetition of litanies and penitential psalms—to escape from the pursuing phantom, which seemed ever beckoning him to the pit of endless punishment. And now at last they reached him—those white deadly arms—they clasped him—they drew him down—he was lost, lost for ever!

Not beatific visions assuredly, those which prompted the delirious ravings of that saintly death-bed to which the fathers of the hermit community had come for edification; yet it was against all rule and precedent, and would have been a grievous blow and discouragement to the theories of the place, that such a life as that of Frá Simone should not have availed to vanquish the evil one at last; so it was decided that though the struggle had been an awful one, fearful to witness and to think of, Satan had received a notable and memorable repulse, and Frá Simone was chronicled among the saintly examples of the efficacy of a life passed at *Sagro Eremo*.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

It is needless to dwell on the consternation which fell on our friends at the *cereria* on the morning of the 24th; on poor Beppina's grief; on the rumours, surmises, inquiries, and information more or less correct, resulting from the report of the Misericordia brethren who had been engaged on that last sad "work of mercy" to poor Tina; or on the nine days' wonder which furnished gossip-loving Florence with amusement for that limited period. All this may be easily imagined.

It will be easily understood, also, that this scandalous

catastrophe was felt as a great vexation and annoyance in those specially "right-thinking" circles which had recently committed themselves to the patronage of Filippo Lonari. Such a deplorable scandal to have blazed out to the public eye, so immediately too after the name of the artist had been designated to all Florence as employed in a great religious work by "an august lady!" The august lady felt exceedingly disgusted, and her disgust communicated itself from link to link in the "respectable" social chain, causing in each a painful shock as it passed, till it reached poor old Laudadio in his *cereria*, on whom the blow of Pippo's disgraceful break-down thus fell severely in more ways than one. The very reverend Canon Capucci was specially disgusted and annoyed at having been led into making himself the channel of such a recommendation in "high quarters." He bitterly reproached the hapless wax-chandler, spoke of the discredit thrown, in the eyes of the ungodly, even on the newly established devotion, and on Santa Filomena herself; hinted at sacrilege having been committed in the selection of such a model for such a purpose; and would doubtless have bullied and frightened the poor man to a much greater extent, had it not been that just about that time the "religion" of Santa Filomena received a far more serious blow and discouragement, which made it desirable for the saint's distinguished patrons to say as little about her as possible, only hoping that she might drop out of the popular mind as quietly and speedily as might be.

The extremely disagreeable and untoward facts of the case were these: of course the new "religion" could not be established—at least not with that credit and *éclat* which the saint's distinguished patroness was bent on conferring on her protégée, without the veritable body of the saint—the body she had worn when in the flesh. As well might a coroner think of holding his inquest without the body he is to "sit upon!" Now the body of St. Filomena was in the catacombs at Rome—of course it was, as where else should a respectable saint's body be? So a petition was

sent to the then occupant of St. Peter's seat from the distinguished lady at Florence, begging him, as guardian and administrator of all the saints' bodies in those inexhaustible magazines, to look out the body of St. Filomena and send it to Florence as a base for the proposed new devotion. Of course the holy father could not hesitate for an instant to grant so eminently right-thinking a request. St. Filomena was at once taken out of store and forwarded to Florence, with duly certified documents rehearsing the discovery of her in a tomb, authentically inscribed with her name. Of course no expense was spared in preparing a fittingly magnificent receptacle for the precious relic. But it so happened that while the saint was waiting to be thus decently housed, one of those detestable intermeddling men of science,—whose poking and prying is continually causing disturbance to religious minds in a manner which abundantly justifies the Church and her right-thinking supporters in feeling that science must at all cost be put down—contrived in an unlucky hour to get access to the body. He examined the holy relics in the most irreverent manner, and discovered—and with that diabolically malicious hatred of religion which characterises his class, took care to publish the discovery—that both the saint's thigh-bones belonged to the right leg, and had both belonged to individuals of the masculine gender.

What saint could make head against such a combination of unfortunate circumstances as this? Here was a misfortune which threw the *contretemps* of the scandal attaching to the picture into the shade. Of course St. Filomena and her "religion" had to be "withdrawn," and as little said about the matter as might be. Had it not been for these circumstances Signor Laudadio would assuredly not so soon have heard the last from Canon Capucci of his unfortunate recommendation. As it was, the wealthy tradesman was fain to make his peace with his clerical patrons by coming down with a handsome sum in payment for a "novena," and a very handsome display of wax candles, three or four pounds in weight each, and duly

carried off into the sacristy, after burning a quarter of an hour or so, to remedy as far as might be the mischief done.

On the fourth day after Pippo's disappearance, while the dismay, and the talk, and the recriminations were still at their height, the following letter was brought to his old comrade Tito Fanetti, the prosperous "regular-work-and-regular-pay" copyist:

"SIGNOR TITO FANETTI,

"I will not call you my friend, for I know that you would own that title no longer. Nevertheless, for the sake of former days, I think that you will do for me what I now request of you.

"I beg you to go to the *cereria* of Signor Laudadio Benincasa, and to see that gentleman, and his daughter Beppina, to whom I was engaged to be married on St. John's day last past.

"Say to them that the wrath of God has been upon me, and the curse incurred by my desertion of my sacred calling has overtaken me. Say that my sin found me out in time to leave open to me a door of possible redemption, and to save her from wedding with one vowed in the sight of God to celibacy.

"Of any part of my conduct towards her or towards any other, I say nothing, for henceforth I am dead to the world, and heedless of its pardon or its condemnation. I now live only to make my peace with God and the Church, and to save, if it may be, my own soul.

FILIPPO LONARI."

Honest Tito lost no time in executing the commission entrusted to him. It was not accomplished in terms quite so laconical and succinct as those in which it had been committed to him. Talk led to talk. Signor Laudadio had to be listened to while he moralised on the event after his own fashion. Pretty Beppina had also to be consoled.

Tito did both these good offices to the best of his ability.

He painted the fresco, too, in due time in the *loggia* behind the *cereria*.

The old wax-chandler, who had at first been led by mere chance to conceive the notion of thus entering himself on the list of fame, as a rival to the Albizzi and Pitti of old, had by degrees come to set his heart on the project.

"He was to have painted me a large picture in fresco too, in the *loggia* here in the garden," said the old man one day to Tito, when they had come to speak of Pippo, as people do of one who has been removed from them by death. "Well, well! Perhaps it is all for the best. I should have liked to see the *loggia* painted too," he added, after a pause. Then, after a still longer silence—"Did you ever paint in fresco, Signor Tito?"

"As a student, Signor Laudadio, I tried my hand on two or three walls. But of late years my work has been copying—humble work, it is true, sir; but I have lived by it, not altogether badly; and have paid my way, and owe no man anything. After all, Signor Laudadio, that is something; and I am content with my work."

"I believe you," returned the old trader, cordially. "Something! it is everything! Still, young men will be ambitious. High art is a very grand thing. Fame is pleasant,—and sometimes very profitable also. Should you like now to try your fortune at a great picture, if you had the opportunity?"

"I should be very glad to accept such a commission, certainly," said Tito in a business-like way, speaking very distinctly, as he added, "providing it were paid at such a rate as to render my time so employed as valuable to me as if I were at work on my copies."

"Ah!—Ha!—Hum! Very just; very true," rejoined the would-be Mécenas, with an air of being somewhat taken aback by Tito's very business-like view of the matter. Another long pause occurred; after which the old man continued, in a more hesitating manner: "Poor Pippo seemed to think that in such a case the work would be well paid by the opportunity of making a name."

"Perhaps he may have been right, my dear sir," said Tito, speaking clearly and frankly, and without the least embarrassment; "but I in my position could not afford to pay so much for an opportunity. I would give for such an opportunity, all the difference between the pay of a copyist and the pay of an original artist, doing my best for wages at the former rate. But more than this I could not give."

"Good, good! there is nothing to be said against that," replied the old man, adding, as he looked shrewdly and not unapprovingly at the young artist, "you speak like a man of business, Signor Tito."

"And I always try to act like one, my dear sir. And if you will pardon me for saying so much, my opinion is, that what is worth money, will rarely be got without paying money or money's worth for it in some shape. The artist who gives his time and work, most probably gives what is worth nothing."

"Perhaps you are right, Signor Tito," admitted the wax-chandler, whose trading modes of thought were not averse to this practical mode of viewing matters; "perhaps you are right. But tell me now, if I *were* to make up my mind to be guilty of an extravagance for the sake of humouring a whim, what might a fresco covering the back of the *loggia* cost now,—paid for at the rate you were speaking of?"

"That would of course depend, Signor Laudadio, on the amount of time occupied on the work; and that would in some degree depend on the subject. What would be the nature of the subject you would think of putting on that wall?"

"Oh, I've got the subject all ready," returned Signor Laudadio briskly; "and in fact that is mainly the reason why I want to have the picture painted; for it is to commemorate an event that ought not to be forgotten."

"Ah! an historical picture," said the artist; "something from the history of Florence?"

"Yes, exactly; at least an event in the history of the *cereria*, which is a part of Florence, you know."

“An event in the history of your *cereria*, Signor Laudadio!”

“Yes, sir; precisely so: and you will allow it is one which ought to be commemorated, and admirably adapted for artistic treatment. It happened in the time of my grandfather, of happy memory. They were busy with a very large boiling of wax in the warehouse here; all hands were at the work; and my grandfather, rest his soul! was superintending, when all of a sudden they heard the bell, which gave notice that the most holy sacrament was passing in the street on its way to some poor dying sinner. Of course every man of them ran out to throw themselves on their knees as it passed, leaving the caldron to take care of itself, just at the critical moment. They could do no less, you know; and my grandfather, who made a point of having none but really pious men in his employment, would have much preferred losing a caldron of wax, to having it said that the ‘*santissimo*’ had passed his door without due respect having been shown it. Well, the wax boiled over, while the men were on their knees in the street; the whole caldron-full caught fire; and there was such a blaze as was never seen in the *cereria* before or since! I said the caldron was left to take care of itself. The Holy Virgin and the Saints forgive me!—It was left in better keeping than that of any earthly workman! When the men ran in,—not till the ‘*santissimo*’ had passed, you understand,—the blaze was roaring up against the rafters of the roof, and everybody thought that the house must have been burned down. My grandfather and the men—three of them, that is—ran for buckets of water: and a difficult and dangerous job it was to get near enough to the flames to throw the water on the raging fire. But the fourth man,—his name was Nanni Puliti; he had been recommended to my grandfather by his brother the sacristan at San Giovanni,—never stirred to get water, but threw himself on his knees in the doorway. Well, you know the great image of the Holy Virgin, on the wall opposite the entrance? while the

others were singeing their beards with throwing water on the fire, Nanni, who knew a trick worth two of that, prayed to the Virgin. Would you believe it? the fire went out, and no great mischief was done! And Nanni told us afterwards that he had seen the Holy Virgin, as he looked at her across the flames, raise her arm, and stretch it out towards the caldron. And it was at that moment that the flames subsided. The other men wanted to lay claim to the merit of putting the fire out with the water. But my grandfather,—he was a pious man, was my grandfather, God rest his soul!—consulted his confessor on the subject; and the miracle was recognised by many learned divines; and Nanni Puliti was known to be the man who had saved the *cereria*. And my grandfather made him a handsome present, and had his picture taken; and there it hangs in the warehouse to this day. Now there's a subject for a great historical picture!—historical, religious, and domestic at the same time. Of course the moment to choose would be that when the Virgin is stretching out her blessed arm towards the raging flames. The men would be throwing their buckets of water on them in vain. But I should like my grandfather to be represented as struck with astonishment and awe at the visible miraculous interposition. In fact it was seen by Nanni Puliti only. But such a licence as that is always permissible to high art. Of course my portrait would be introduced in a kneeling position in one corner of the picture; and I would not object, if you wished it, to your giving the likeness of the artist in the person of one of the men,—not in that of Nanni, of course; that would not be fair. There of course we must have his own portrait—it is but just to his memory, poor fellow! He was afterwards accused of robbing my grandfather, by carrying off goods from the warehouse secretly. And if it had not been that the chaplain of St. Giovanni told my grandfather that the accusation was a malicious falsehood, he would have lost his place. It is but right that we should do justice to his memory."

Signor Laudadio Benincasa had been in a state of great enjoyment while making the foregoing unusually long oration. The sense of importance, dignity, patronising, had gently flooded his heart, as the music of his own voice sounded in his ears, with a pleasure so subtle and so sweet that it was quite beyond his strength to forego the scheme, which would enable him to enjoy much more of the same sort. At the bottom of his heart, moreover, he appreciated and approved the honest painter's determination to be paid for his work; and was inclined to agree with him in the business-like opinion, that what is got for nothing is very apt to be worth exactly the same. So Tito Fanetti's very moderate terms were agreed to by him; and the great fresco was painted on the wall of the loggia in the garden of the *cereria*, where it may be seen to this day.

Of course the execution of this great work gave the worthy painter very ample opportunity for the performance of that other task, of consoling the charming Beppina. She was not intended by nature to wear the willow. Weave the wreath of it how she would, it was by no means becoming to her style of beauty. And she took to her consolation kindly; and in due time to her consoler also. Tito too, to own the truth, fond as he was of his art, laboured more willingly at this latter work, than at the painting of the great wax-chandling miracle. The fact was that he scarcely appreciated, as he should have done, the grandeur of the subject; and it is to be feared that his irreverent wit may have led the laughter-loving Beppina into a little not altogether respectfully filial quizzing of the great design. Certain it is that the consolation, which his work in the loggia gave him such abundant opportunities of offering, very soon passed out of the lachrymose vein, and took the form of laughing altogether. And, in a word, by the time the great historical, religious, domestic fresco was finished, they had persuaded each other that by far the most consoling thing that could happen to either of them, was to take each other for better and worse, and do their best to laugh through life together. Old Laudadio

was rather taken by surprise when Tito opened the proposal to him, and at first made some little difficulty. But he had become accustomed to the artist's presence in the house, and had taken a liking to him after his not very expansive fashion. Then Beppina, looking the very picture of blooming health and plump jollity the while, assured him that her constitution could not stand being crossed in love, and that she should infallibly sink into the cold and silent tomb at a very early date if he opposed her wishes. So the paternal consent was given; and Beppina became Signora Fanetti, by the light of such a quantity of wax candles as had not illuminated a marriage ceremony in fair Florence for a long time.

Notwithstanding the change in his circumstances, honest Tito did not abandon his favourite maxim of regular work and regular pay. Perhaps his mid-day siesta may have lasted a little longer, and his return from the studio to his home been somewhat earlier in the afternoon, now that a wife was waiting for him there, than when the comfortable life which he appreciated depended solely on the labour of his hands. For at the death of his father-in-law he found himself very comfortably off in the world;—not extravagantly rich, for old Laudadio left a considerable portion of his wealth to various sorts of “pious uses;”—but yet sufficiently so to make the rapidly increasing family with which Beppina presented him a source of no such painful anxiety as its multiplication must have been, had no wax-chandlery profits existed.

As for Beppina, she would be a very handsome matron at the present day had she not become so unconscionably stout.

A

TUSCAN ROMEO AND JULIET.

A FLORENTINE CHRONICLE OF THE 13TH CENTURY,



TUSCAN ROMEO AND JULIET.

CHAPTER I.

THE BARDI AND THE BUONDELMONTI.

HERE is an Italian mediæval chronicle, of which the legitimate conclusion is, in due story-teller's phrase, that "they all lived happy ever after." The history, remarkable as it is in many respects, is especially singular in this. For few indeed are the records of the domestic life of that time and clime of which the same can be said! For once and away we have neither bloodshed, poison, nor the rack!—neither battle, murder, nor sudden death;—at least as regards the principal personages in whom the reader is asked to take an interest;—nay, there is not even any breach of any one of the commandments, but, on the contrary, much of admirably noble virtue and heroic self-sacrifice.

But then, this privileged chronicle belongs to the really good old times of the Florentine republic, before papal and imperial despotism had killed all noble sentiment, and made virtue impossible: the rough old days, when fighting indeed was rife in the streets of Florence, and deeds of violence were common; but when men, who believed themselves to be in the right, fought those whom they believed to be in the wrong; when violent passions were set in action in support of ideas, rather than of interests,—the real spring-tide of modern Italian civilisation, long anterior to that so-called *Renaissance* period which has so generally

and so erroneously been considered such. That so celebrated sixteenth century epoch of Renaissance was unquestionably the birth-time of much in Italy; but it was the death-time of much more: and that which was being newly born in art, in literature, in thought, became the heritage of Transalpine Europe, the starting-point of new civilisations, and thus made the renown and glory of "the Renaissance." But of that, which was dying in Italy at the same period, the loss was confined to Italy. Europe took comparatively little heed of this portion of the sixteenth century's operation in Italy. She gathered the ripe fruits which dropped from the tree of Italian civilisation on the eve of its own decay, and called that harvest-time of hers a birth-time and morning of a new day, little regarding that, to Italy herself, the relative value and position of that time was a very different one. A more accurate knowledge of the history of Italian civilisation and literature than has hitherto been common among us would very much modify the popular idea of the Renaissance period; and it would be found that the high-tide of modern social progress in Italy, and especially in Florence, which has ever been the fountain-head of Italian civilisation, must be sought, not in the sixteenth, but in the thirteenth century.

Now, it was just about the middle of that century that the events to be here narrated took place, in Florence.

In the Via de' Bardi, which skirts the bank of the Arno on the south or left-hand side of the river, is still visible the ancient mansion of the great family of that name. In the days when every Florentine magnate's house was a fortress, and had ample need to be a strong one, if it were to enable its owner to hold his own in the ever-changing vicissitudes of civic broils and party warfare, no house in Florence had seen harder fighting or had shown a bolder front to its foes than Casa Bardi. One of the most remarkable events indeed in all the long story of the old Florentine street-warfare was the attack on this stout old civic castle,—for such the homes of the Florentine patri-

cians were,—in which it was taken and sacked by the populace. But this occurred more than a hundred years after the period of which we have now to speak.

The owners of this building, the great patrician family of the Bardi, were in those days—days before the Medici or Strozzi were heard or thought of—the most extensive and wealthiest merchant-princes of Italy. Later, about a hundred years after the times here spoken of, and two or three years after that sacking of their house just mentioned, the great firm of Bardi, Peruzzi, and Co. failed, and shook by their fall the whole then vast fabric of Italian commercial credit, scattering wide-spread ruin throughout Florence, and in many another commercial city of Italy. This terrible commercial earthquake must not be imagined to have arisen from so small an accident as the destruction and pillage of the family mansion. It was caused, unhappily, by the impossibility of recovering a loan made by the Italian bankers to Edward the Third of England, to the amount, enormous in those days, of 1,365,000 golden florins! The money was never repaid, and vouchers for the debt are yet in existence in the hands of descendants of the ill-used bankers; but it is to be feared that “the stock” is not a valuable one.

This ruin was, however, still a hundred years distant in the future at the date of our story, in the middle of the thirteenth century. But things were, nevertheless, going ill with the Bardi in 1258, which is the exact date of the following chronicle. Things were going ill with them in common with all the great Ghibelline faction. For the Bardi were not only great merchants and bankers, but great Ghibellines also. And for the last eight years in Florence, fortune had been a thorough-going Guelph partizan. In 1250, the Ghibellines went out from Florence to attack the Guelph exiles, bent on fighting their way back to their homes. The former were routed with much slaughter. The Guelphs regained complete ascendancy in the city. It was “*væ victis*,” as usual! And the Ghibellines had in their turn to submit to exile and confiscation.

From that time the Guelph faction retained the ascendancy till September, 1260, when the great and memorable battle of Montaperti,—that fight which, as Dante tells us, “tinged Arbia’s waters red,” reversed matters once again, and restored the Ghibellines to their homes and to power.

It was a glowing hot afternoon of July in 1258,—the after dinner hour of the siesta. But there was no siesta that day in Casa Bardi; nor, indeed, as far as might be judged by the appearance of the streets, were the citizens generally indulging in that much-loved repose during the hours of great heat. There was on the contrary an unusual degree of movement in Florence. The streets, instead of being deserted, as usual at that hour, were full of men; and they all wore an appearance of excitement or agitation. In Casa Bardi the male members of the family were assembled in a vast and lofty hall on the ground-floor of the house. Two windows, high in the wall and looking into the inner court of the building, lighted the great vaulted chamber very imperfectly. But the result of this was, that the room was deliciously cool, while the temperature outside its thick walls was almost at blood heat. The furniture of this sombre prison-like hall was of the simplest and scantiest kind. There was a huge long table of walnut wood on tressels, around which there were a number of wooden stools, and a couple of large clumsily made straight-backed wooden-seated arm-chairs. On either side of a large hatch-doorway, evidently intended for the passage of the dishes and flagons from the kitchen, was a great open cupboard or buffet on which were ranged dishes of earthenware and of brass, and pitchers of both these materials, together with drinking glasses and cups of horn.

There were four members of the family present. Old Bardo Bardi, a venerable looking old man, the head of the family and of the great banking firm, was seated in one of the arm-chairs. His eldest son, Vincenzo, was pacing with impatient steps and angry mien up and down the wide flag-paved floor of the hall; his second son, Rodolfo, was

sitting on one of the stools at the table near him ; and his grandson, Vincenzo's son, Luigi, was seated at the far end of the long table.

In each of these three generations the family prejudices, loves, and hatreds were equally strong. For the family tie was a powerful one in those days, and families held together for good or for evil. They were all furious Ghibellines. For though the Bardi had so far complied with the spirit of the times as to become citizens and bankers, their prejudices as old feudal nobility of the Empire had ensured their sympathies to the Ghibelline faction in the city. That party was always essentially the aristocratic one throughout Italy, while the popular feeling in Florence was ever steadily on the Guelph side. But this division of the city into Ghibellines and plebeians must not be understood to be at all an exhaustive one. For there was at all times a strong body of Guelphic nobility.

The family of old Bardo Bardi comprised at that time no other male member. Rodolfo, his second son, was unmarried, and Vincenzo, the elder, was a widower. The ladies of the family were two only ; the Contessa Anna, the aged wife of the head of the family, and Dianora, the daughter of Vincenzo, and sister of the young Luigi. The latter was just sixteen at the date of our story.

Of this young Dianora the hope and pride of Casa Bardi, the chronicles speak in the most enthusiastic terms. She was, we are assured, the queen of beauty in Florence in her day. She was small and sylph-like in figure, dark-haired, and exquisitely perfect in the smallness of her finely-cut features, and the transparent delicacy of her complexion.

For the present, however, we must be content to occupy ourselves with the appearance of the gentlemen of the family, assembled in the hall.

The ever-increasing gravity of our present social system in its adult years, and the all-work-and-no-play tendencies of our civilisation have well-nigh banished colour from the costume of the male portion of the nations of Europe. It

was not so when our social world was younger, and cakes and ale metaphorically as well as literally, together with habits and tastes "all in a concatenation accordingly," were more in vogue. The silver-haired grandfather, old Bardo, is, it is true, clad in sad-coloured garments, as becomes his years. He is sitting in his spun-flax shirt-sleeves and under tunic of ash-colour, having laid his long similarly-coloured mantle with its civic hood on the arm of his chair because of the heat. But the two men in the prime of life, his sons, have both of them bright colours in their dress,—"*calze*," "*chausses*," or hose of crimson cloth, fitting closely, and covering the entire foot and leg from toe to hip; and loose open coats, also of bright colour, reaching to the knee. Young Luigi has similar close-fitting hose, but of a still gayer tint,—a pink or salmon colour; and instead of the loose upper garment, a tight fitting jacket of light green. Many a similar figure must occur to the recollection of readers conversant with the productions of early Italian art.

But though all the persons present were clad in civil costume, their talk was of warfare, and of the probability of having, at short notice, to defend their home and persons against an attack of the populace. Yet it does not follow as a matter of course, that these patrician gentlemen were men of the sword. It would have been so in almost any other of the countries of Europe at that epoch; but it was not so in Florence. For the "*cedant arma togæ*" tendency was already beginning to manifest itself among the wealthy nobility on the banks of the Arno.

One of the first divisions of labour, which occurs in a rapidly wealth-producing society, is that which assigns to different classes the creation and the defence of the accumulated stores. Skill in double entry and the principles of exchange is found to be not conveniently compatible with military habits,—with the practice of military duties in time of war, and a taste for military pastimes in the intervals of peace. And the rich merchants and bankers of Florence began at a very early period to find, that it

suiting them better to hire others to do the fighting for them, which was in those days absolutely necessary to be done in some way by whosoever had anything to keep or to lose, than to do it for themselves. And this was a necessary consequence and condition of social progress. But unfortunately they found these defenders not among their own people, but among the subjects of other states. And this was one determining cause of all the subsequent misfortunes and ultimate ruin of the republic.

Nevertheless, there were men even at periods much later than that of which we are speaking, who handled both the ledger and the sword; and there was no time up to the final fall of the republic, at which military prowess and talent were not found among the Florentines, though unhappily not in sufficient abundance to make the reliance of the state on foreign mercenaries unnecessary.

In the case of the family of the Bardi, moreover, their feudal ancestry, and their position as territorial as well as civic nobles make it probable that, merchants and bankers as they were, they were not unused to harness and saddle, when a blow for the Ghibelline cause was to be struck either within or without the city.

In the then position of affairs in Florence, however, there was no good to be hoped from an immediate appeal to arms. The stream was running too strongly in favour of the Guelphs; and the Ghibellines had to await their day of revenge with what patience they could. The immediate question was as to the advisability of so far yielding to the storm as to quit Florence,—a step to which several leading Ghibelline families had already been driven by the fury of the populace.

“If things go on much further thus,” said Vincenzo de Bardi, continuing his quick and angry walk up and down the hall, “Florence will be no longer a place to live in! Better shut up books and house, and betake ourselves to Siena!”

“As so many of the best citizens of Florence have already done,” rejoined his brother Rodolfo. “The

Guidi and the Lamberti are off, and will join the others of our friends already in Siena."

"Have you heard, father, the news of this morning?" asked Vincenzo, suddenly stopping in his walk and turning to his father.

"The news of every morning for the last eight years has been all equally bad, my son!" replied the old man, "Since the accursed day at Figline, Florence is in mourning; and with the scoundrel Guelph in the ascendant, what but misfortune can the news be?"

"Several of the Uberti, it is said, as many as seven men, were taken by the populace and murdered this morning!" continued Vincenzo.

"Farinata has not been taken or murdered," said the old man fiercely; "Farinata degli Uberti lives, and the day of vengeance and retribution will come, though it may come too late for me."

At that moment a young man of the Peruzzi family, the allies and commercial partners of the Bardi, entered the room, and after reverent salutation to the old man, said:

"Sirs! I am the bringer of ugly tidings, and cannot hope for welcome. The Abbot of Vallombrosa was seized this morning, and they have this instant struck his head from his body at the Bargello. He was put to the torture for more than two hours, and is said to have made compromising disclosures. I hastened hither to let you know the facts."

"The sacrilegious Guelph hounds!" exclaimed Rodolfo. "What is to be done, sir?" he continued, turning to his father.

"I shall not move from Florence," said the old man, decisively. "This old house has received hard blows in its time; but it has given perhaps as hard back again. We will trust to the old walls once again."

"Besides," interposed Vincenzo, "what had the holy Abbot to tell?"

"Two hours of torture may make a man tell whatever his enemies wish to hear," said Peruzzi. "Besides, what

matters a little more or less of truth to a Guelph examiner?"

"Little enough! the false, faithless scum!" replied Rodolfo. "This is the worst of the bad days Florence has seen," he went on, "since the populace threw down the towers of the nobles,* just eight years since!"

"The populace," cried old Bardo, with extreme disdain; "the populace never did anything in Florence, and never will, when not led and hounded on by traitor nobles. Would the poor craftsmen, think you, have dared to lift a hand against the towers of the Bardi, if they had not been led by renegade patricians, false to their order, to their honour, and their allegiance? What would have mattered the riot of the 20th of October—even if riot there had been—had it not been for the accursed traitors of the Buondelmonti? I have no resentment, for my part," continued the old man, "against the poor fools, who would cry down the Guelphs as fiercely as they now bellow against the Ghibellines, if there were a change of fortune. But I do hate a traitor noble! Never can I forgive or forget the treason and the hate and the injuries of Uguccione Buondelmonte and his villain sons. And if ever my descendants should forget the feud between our house and theirs, I think that my bones would not rest quiet in my grave!"

And, indeed, the look on the old man's face, as he spoke, did not belie his words. It is difficult to imagine an expression more eloquent of rancour and undying hate, than that which gleamed out from his eyes, deep set beneath their pent-house of black eyebrow,—black still as jet, despite the seventy-five years which had silvered his hair. The fact was, that the hereditary hatred which existed between the Buondelmonti and the Bardi families, was not due to their belonging to the adverse sides of the great Guelph and Ghibelline quarrel alone. There was enmity, of course, between the Bardi and any and every house of the

* On the 20th of October, 1250, the Florentines, led by the chiefs of the Guelphs, levelled all the towers, which were the especial mark of a patrician house, to the height of fifty *braccia*, or about 96 feet.

rival Guelphic faction, but not necessarily the bitter hatred which made every Bardi feel every human being in whose veins ran any mixture of Buondelmonti blood, to be his personal and irreconcilable enemy. The two families nourished for many generations, as if it had been a valuable heir-loom, the most violent animosity against each other. It had become with either clan a point of honour and a part of their creed to hate the other. It is impossible to know now how this enmity first originated. Possible enough, indeed, that at the period of which I have been speaking, the haters on either side had already forgotten its cause. With them, at all events, it was then enough for any son or daughter of either house to know that man or woman belonged to the other, to hold them in intensest aversion and contempt. And of course the party quarrels and faction fights, which were continually distracting the city, offered abundant opportunities to both of them to wreak their private vengeance under cover of the public feud.

The Buondelmonti family ought, it might be supposed from their antecedents, to have been Ghibellines. They also had been territorial nobles of the old time, before the cities had risen into importance—barons quite of the old school, too. They had possessed a stronghold a few miles from Florence, on the road to Rome, whence they had issued to stop travellers, levy black mail, harry merchants, and educate their serfs to brigandage in the true old baronial style. Papal Rome had to endure, and live in fear of such for many a dreary century after the twelfth. But the vigorous burghers of Florence at a very early period found means to abate all such nuisances in their neighbourhood. The barons Buondelmonti—(they were called in those days Monteboni, and took the other name subsequently to their reduction to civilised life)—the Buondelmonti barons were admonished by the citizens, their neighbours, to observe henceforward the laws of *meum* and *tuum*, even as ignoble burghers. Of course they spurned the warning. So one fine morning the Florentines started

forth from the city early, and before mid-day had smoked the mischievous vermin from their lair, and razed the black old walls of their fortress-tower to the ground. The Monteboni thereupon divided themselves into two branches. One of these settled in Florence, and thenceforth called themselves Buondelmonte. The other betook themselves to Sarzana, and, subsequently, to other cities, and were ever afterwards known—rather extensively some of them—under the name of Buonaparte. Such an origin, it may seem, should have inclined the issue of these bold barons to the Ghibelline side of the great quarrel. But the Monteboni were, it seems, in those days men who comprehended the spirit of their times, and were not above taking a lesson. The Florentine branch of them, at all events, became citizens, and strong Guelphs. They became, also, as we have seen, enemies to the death of the great Ghibelline family of the Bardi.

Now, on that July day, in 1258, of which we have been speaking, there was trouble and unhappiness also in Casa Buondelmonti. Their faction in the city was in the ascendant, their enemies were in distress and discouragement, and yet the Buondelmonti were not happy!

The eldest branch of the family—for the Buondelmonti had already thriven, increased, and multiplied in their city home—consisted at the period in question of Ugo, or Ugucione, Buondelmonti, the son of one of the same name who had died three or four years before, his wife the Lady Lisabetta, his brother Carlo, and his son Ippolito. Of this son, Ippolito, then in his twenty-first year, the pride and hope of the Buondelmonti clan, we are told all sorts of good things. He was the best, the bravest, the handsomest, the most accomplished of the youth of Florence at that day. Many a mother among the matrons of the Guelph party avowedly, and many a daughter of the same noble houses in the secret of her own heart, had cast their eyes on the young heir of the Buondelmonti, as the most desirable match in Florence,—among the Guelphs only of course; for it was as much out of the question that a leading man

of the one party should seek to ally himself with the daughter of a house belonging to the other, as that he should think of marrying a Turk or an Infidel.

It will readily be understood, that this only son of the Buondelmonti—and he a son of such promise in the eyes of all men, and so peerless in those of his own family—was the pride of his father's heart, and the idol of his mother's worship. And now there was trouble in Casa Buondelmonti, because Ippolito was pining under an illness, which baffled all the skill of the physicians. Marvellously small was the amount of that all, it must be admitted. But of the best knowledge Florence could command, the sick youth had had the advantage; and it had availed him nothing. After moping and pining, listless and languid, refusing his food and growing visibly thinner and paler for several days, he had at last taken to his bed; and his parents became seriously alarmed. And the doctors shook their heads, and muttered their Latin; but finally admitted, that they could understand nothing of the cause of his malady.

But there is no need of making a mystery to the reader of that which was so painfully mysterious to young Ippolito's friends. The boy was simply in love; and was prostrated on a sick bed absolutely by no other malady whatever.

Now to us, with our northern vigour of volition, habits of self-control and robuster nervous constitution, this seems ridiculous; a melodramatic exaggeration, barely to be tolerated in love lyrics, and utterly to be scouted as a genuine physiological fact. We are apt to be sceptical as to the veritable heart-break of a love-sick girl, and utterly intolerant of male love-despair. A hard day's work at the desk, or at the plough, over a tough brief, or over a difficult country, we hold to be sovereign in such cases. And though it may be held, unquestionably with reason, that our more fully and strongly developed northern idiosyncrasies are capable of passion deeper and more concentrated in proportion to their greater vigour of mental and bodily

fibre; still we are not in the habit of seeing our lovers take to their beds as a consequence of exposure to Dan Cupid's arrows.

Nevertheless it would be a mistake to suppose that poor Ippolito Buondelmonti's sickness was either an exaggeration or an affectation, or that the cause of it was other than the romantic one, which has been assigned. Such cases are common enough and true enough among the less strongly but more delicately constituted organisations of the southern races of Europe. Among the phenomena of southern life there is not one that strikes a northern observer as more remarkable and surprising, than the directness, violence, and rapidity with which mental emotions affect the bodily health of the people in every class of society. A man takes a dose of salts, because, as he tells you, he had the misfortune to get into a rage with his *valet*. A married couple are both ill in bed; and scandal tells of a matrimonial tiff as the cause of their malady. A servant goes to bed with a nervous head-ache in consequence of a reproof from his employer. An artisan has to be bled because of the feverish excitement occasioned by his anxiety to complete a piece of work. We talk of "yellow envy;" but among these people the "*bile tumet jecur*" is no mere figure of speech. And the envious man has to do penance for an access of his vile fault, in the shape of "*pil. hydrarg.*" within twenty-four hours. We speak of dying for love; but if such a thing ever does occur, it is mostly after the fashion of Byron's "Lord Mountcoffeehouse, the Irish peer." While on the sunny side of the Alps, that a man should be killed by an unrequited love fit would seem as much in the nature of things, as that he should be killed by a pistol shot.

The judicious reader will have perceived at once the close connection of this delicate susceptibility of the nervous system with many of the special excellencies and defects of the Italian character; its indication of defective moral stamina; and its bearing on all those constitutional peculiarities that go to the production of genius.

But our present business with these characteristics of southern human nature is not to philosophise on them, but simply to accept them, as an explanation, and in some sort as an excuse for the fact that poor Ippolito Buondelmonti is absolutely and genuinely ill a-bed, and really in a fair way to make a bad business of it, and all from no other cause whatever than the wound inflicted by a pair of bright eyes.

CHAPTER II.

A MOTHER AND SON.

BUT whose were the bright eyes that had done the mischief? Ay! that was the question. Not as yet the question in Casa Buondelmonti; for the nature of the malady which has stricken down the heir of the house has not yet been discovered. The family are still in despair; and the learned physicians are still shaking their heads, still chattering barbarous Latin, and still quarrelling with each other with all that peculiar acrimony which characterises the efforts of old systems and theories to defend themselves against rising and encroaching younger knowledge. For the grey-bearded senior by the bedside of Ippolito was a disciple of the old Arab-derived doctrines of the still celebrated Salernitan school; while a younger colleague was all for the more modern ideas of rapidly rising Padua. But both united a vast quantity of *verbal* erudition with an amount of ignorance of all the *things* belonging to their science, that would astound the most incapable ignoramus ever "spun" by the college. And both made it abundantly clear that they had not the slightest idea of the nature of their patient's malady.

And in all likelihood the young man would have died and made no sign, had it not been that another beside the

doctors had been watching the case with very different eyes from theirs. In such a case, where is the skill in diagnosis that can equal that of a woman and a mother? While the doctors had been disputing, the lady Lisabetta had been silently watching and pondering, with all the intuitive acuteness of a woman, and all the intense and minute observation of an idolising mother. And Monna * Lisabetta had at last formed her own opinion on the subject, and had made up her mind to attempt a cast of her own skill in the treatment of it.

The lady Lisabetta Buondelmonte was still a young and beautiful woman when her son was in his twentieth year. Married, as was then very usual and is still not uncommon in Italy, at sixteen, she was only at the time of which we are speaking, in her thirty-seventh year, and might have seemed some six or seven years younger. Possibly had a score more years been added to her life, she might, though equally anxious for her darling boy's happiness and well-being, have been less clear-sighted as to the probable cause of his sickness.

It was the morning of the third day since Ippolito had taken to his bed, and the medical rivals had taken their leave after their bootless daily visit, each more completely convinced than ever of the lamentable incompetency of the other, when Monna Lisabetta, after dismissing them, stole back to the chamber where her sick boy lay.

Wearied out by the disputatious talk of his doctors, and by their questionings, the utter irrelevancy of which none could know so entirely as himself, he had thrown his head back on the pillow, and closed his eyes; but he was not sleeping. Ippolito, like his father, and unlike all

* "Monna" is, in fact, an abbreviation of "Madonna," the Italian for "my lady." The abbreviation was used universally in speaking of noble ladies in Tuscany till about the first quarter of the sixteenth century. After that "Donna" was used as long as Spanish fashions were in vogue. But in the reigns of the latter Medici, and after them, the more Italian form "Signora" was adopted. The term "Madonna" *in extenso*, meanwhile, has remained appropriated exclusively to the Holy Virgin.

other Buondelmonti, was of fair complexion; and his silky light-coloured hair, worn long after the fashion of the time, streamed out on either side of his head over the pillow. The expression of his features was placid, and, one would have said, indicative of peaceful happiness; and the pure and lofty white forehead was marked by the lines of blue veins, but by no wrinkle or contraction of the brow. The closed eyes were doubtless feeding on a vision reproduced by memory, which treacherously lulled his fancy in contentment, only to pour into his veins fresh streams of the poison, which was sapping his life. The physical reality of the passion-caused atony, which was destroying him, was but too evident from the emaciation of the long, slender, nervous hands, so frequently characteristic of the Italian race, which were listlessly extended at arm's length on the coverlet on each side of him.

His mother glided to the bedside so noiselessly as not to disturb his waking dream; and after looking down for a minute on his calm pale face with a sad smile of unspeakable love, she turned to a faldstool of very roughly carved walnut-wood, that stood by the bed-head, and raising her clasped hands to a rudely-cut crucifix of box-wood suspended above it, knelt in prayer, that had assuredly the merit of faith and earnestness. In a minute or two she rose from her knees, and having ascertained that the young man was not sleeping, she said in a sweet low voice, laying her hand upon the expanse of his forehead as she spoke:

"My son, the learned doctors, I fear me, have wearied thee by an overlong visit?"

"You there, my mother!" said the young man, opening his eyes and looking up with a smile of affection, but yet with an expression of intense weariness; "in truth they have wearied me with their learning, and with the uselessness of it. They can give me no aid, mother."

"Only to know that, my poor boy, is to know something at least of thy ailment. Why art thou so sure that no medicine can give thee help? Thy face, methought,

Ippolito mio, as I looked on it just now, when thou knewest not that any one was near thee, spoke rather of contentment than despair."

"Contentment, my own dear mother, to go away,—away even from you, mother,—forgive me!—and be at rest. So weary am I of this life,—so hopeless, tasteless, barren, does the future of it seem to me, that in truth I am contented to know that I shall not live much longer."

"If such be God's will, my only son, may the Holy Virgin and the saints give me grace to say, His will be done! But it is a bitter thought for thy dear father and myself, my own Ippolito, that we have not been able to make life and the prospect of it tolerable to thee!"

"Nay, mother! sweetest mother! do not speak in that way. God knows that there does not breathe this day in Florence a man who might not envy me, in all that depends on his parents to do or to be for him! But not even a mother's love, not even thine, my own sweet mother, can satisfy all needs, or find a cure for every smart."

"Thou ownest, then, my poor boy, that this nameless malady, which is consuming thee, and which no skill can avail to cure, is in truth the working of some secret sorrow! And we, who fondly thought that everything was before thee that could make life enviable! How fatally have we failed, my Ippolito!"

"Mother! mother! Not so! Not so, indeed. Are there not sorrows which no parent's forethought can ward off, nor no mother's love remedy?"

"None, my own darling, that a mother's love may not at least console;—none that a mother's heart should not share, even though the wound caused by them be mortal! Has there not ever, even from thy childhood, my Ippolito, until now, been entire confidence between me and thee? Trust me, dearest, there is no sorrow of all that can fall to the lot of man to bear, that is not lightened by sharing it with a loving heart. Thou would'st not hide thy heart from thy mother, my own, own boy!"

"Mother! mother!" said he, with a sigh, which was almost a groan, as raising himself in the bed he threw one arm round her neck as she leaned over him, "if help there could be for me, I should have come to you for it. There can be none! And believe me, my own mother, that if I would fain carry with me to my grave the secret of the pain that is killing me, it is because I know that more sorrow and evil, and not good, could only come from the speaking it,—even to you, my mother."

"Ippolito!" said his mother, seating herself on the side of the bed, taking one of his thin wan hands in hers, and bending down till her cheeks brushed his forehead, and the curls of her bright fair hair touched his cheeks, "the time was, and not long since, was it not, my darling, when the love of a mother could have sufficed to make thy happiness?"

"It was so, my mother; alas! alas! that it is so no longer!"

"A love, that a mother cannot give, has become necessary to thy life, my Ippolito! Is it not so?"

Here there came again the deep, deep sigh, that seemed as if it would bring the fluttering remnant of the life forth with it; and he writhed wearily and restlessly as he lay, turning his large blue eyes piteously on the eyes that were looking down into his with such yearning sympathy.

"Mother! mother!" he said, at last, "my heart, my soul, my life, are fatally bound to a love so hopeless, so impossible, so forbidden, that death is the only remedy. Ask me not to tell what it makes my cheek blush to think of!"

Shocked and alarmed as Monna Lisabetta was by such a confession, she determined not to be frightened from her purpose of arriving at the truth, and refused to let her heart believe that, could she but once succeed in that, the mischief would be found too fatal for either remedy or mitigation.

"My child! my child!" she urged, "the words that you have said make it more necessary than before,—nay,

make it your absolute duty not to leave your mother in ignorance of the real truth. I would pledge my life, that no passion, for which a man should blush, has found a place in my son's heart. But think, Ippolito, of all the endless miserable doubts, imaginings, suspicions, fears, that must be our portion—thy father's and mine—if saying what thou hast, thou shouldst refuse to say more!”

There was a silence of some minutes, during which the drops of perspiration, caused by the struggle that was going on within the weakened frame, gathered on his brow.

“Speak to me, my own Ippolito! Is it so difficult to trust a mother?” urged Monna Lisabetta, whispering her silver tones into his ear.

“What would my father say to a son of his confessing his love for a maiden of the Ghibellines?” groaned poor Ippolito.

The light that broke upon Monna Lisabetta brought a measure of relief with it. Untoward, indeed, as such passion was, and grievous as the confession of it would have seemed to the Guelph matron a few days ago, considerations so much more vital to a mother's heart had been recently in question, and vague fears so much more terrible had been awakened by the violence of her son's self-accusation, that the evil seemed by comparison a small one.

“He would prefer, my son, that thy choice should have fallen on one of our own party. But what then! Love will not be commanded. And mayhap thy dear father has not now for the first time to learn the lesson. Thy mother was not the bride, my son, that his father destined for him!”

“But there was not enmity between my father's house and thine, mother; there was not deadly feud, which made a marriage between you hateful to every member of either family alike. Was the chance less than fatal, mother, that made me love put thine ear to my lips, mother

that made a Buondelmonti,” he whispered, “love a daughter of the Bardi? And oh, mother! mother! I

love Dianora Bardi as I think no woman was ever loved before !”

The secret thus at length divulged was a startling one. Monna Lisabetta fully felt on the instant all the dangers and troubles involved in so unfortunate a passion, and all the difficulty that lay before her in the task of saving her son from the consequences of it. Still the brave mother’s heart would not suffer itself to be daunted or discouraged for a moment. Nor did she for a moment contemplate any other remedy for the evils caused by his passion than the gratification of it. Any repugnance she might personally have felt to an alliance between her son and a daughter of the house with which her husband’s family was at deadly feud, vanished at once, and was as nothing in presence of the one paramount object of saving his life. And this was to be accomplished solely by obtaining Dianora dei Bardi for his wife. This was therefore the almost impossible task which Monna Lisabetta found suddenly before her. But she did not flinch ; or, at all events, she would suffer no sign of flinching to betray itself. Her first business was to inspire her despairing son with hope.

“ If so it be, my son,” said she, after a moment’s pause, during which she had allowed no sign of dismay or alarm to escape her, “ Dianora de’ Bardi must be thy wife.”

“ Mother !”

“ Easier would it have been, in truth, to win any other, whomsoever of all the damsels in Florence. Thou hast chosen, my son, or thy fate has chosen for thee, the most arduous emprise of any that Love could have suggested to thee. But what then ? Is that a reason to drop lance from rest, quit the lists, and lay thee down to die ? In my young day the gallants gave not up the game so easily. There was no such word as ‘ hopeless ’ in Love’s language in those days !”

“ Oh, mother ! mother ! remember—a Bardi ! Wouldst thou, my own mother, see me wedded to one of the Bardi ?”

“ I would see thee win the heart thine own heart longs

for. The wife follows the fortunes and faction of her husband. Dianora wedded to thee, will be a conquest from the enemy—a Buondelmonte the more, and a Bardi the less in Florence.”

“But my father, mother? How would my father welcome to his home, think you, a Bardi daughter-in-law?” replied the young man, with bitterness.

“Thy father, my Ippolito, even as thy mother, would doubtless have preferred an alliance with another house. But he knows that love will not arise and cease at will, and he would bid thee, as I do, if so it be that no other choice can consist with thy happiness, to win and wear the maiden honoured by the love of a Buondelmonte, in the teeth and in despite of all her proud and overbearing kinsfolk. The old Roman bridegrooms, I trow, did not wait for the friendship or for the consent of their Sabine fathers-in-law!”

We should scarcely be justified in concluding, from Monna Lisabetta’s words, that the proposal of a Bardi daughter-in-law would have been received by Ugucione Buondelmonte quite in the spirit represented by her, or, indeed, that the excellent matron herself would, under ordinary circumstances, have seriously recommended her son to help himself to a wife quite after the high-handed manner of the old Roman precedent. But the immediate and paramount object, you see, was to rouse the lad from his despairing lethargy; to give him a *quantum suff.* of hope to struggle against the mortal prostration that was extinguishing his life, even though the hope of it were of the most problematical description. For the rest, the poor mother was fain to trust to the chapter of accidents, and the future.

Ippolito started up into a sitting position in the bed, and a gradually deepening flush spread itself over his pale forehead and wan cheeks, as he seized both his mother’s hands in his, and remained looking eagerly into her eyes with a questioning glance of incredulous astonishment. Monna Lisabetta returned his glance quietly, but fixedly;

and waited to let the powerful spell she had ventured to use, have time to work.

Although Ippolito remained without speaking for a space, when he did speak it was with breathless suddenness.

"Mother!" he panted forth, "Mother! can you be in earnest in speaking thus? Bethink you, this is no matter for lightly spoken words, or inconsiderate hopes! Remember that I lie here willing to die, rather than to incur the curse of all who bear my name, by giving it to one who is an enemy to all our blood! Many a wife has been won ere now against desperate odds by a daring deed. Do you think your son is one to forget such teaching, or to shrink from attempting what another has been able to achieve? But I would not strike my father in mid life with a misery that should make all his future days, days of mourning. I would not be the only Buondelmonte that has ever disgraced the name. Do *you* bid me, my mother, to act in despite of all this? Do *you* counsel me to rise from this bed and walk forward in pursuit of my own happiness, heedless of aught else? Have a care, mother, for it might be that at your bidding I should do it?"

He sank back on the pillow, exhausted by the intensity of his feeling and the energy with which he had spoken; and the blood faded away slowly from his brow and cheeks, leaving them to the sickly pallor they had worn, before he had been excited.

This time it was Monna Lisabetta's turn to pause before she was ready with her reply. The taking upon herself the responsibility which her son thus solemnly cast upon her, required at least some moments of consideration. The crop from the word-seeds she had scattered on his heart came up with a force and rapidity which alarmed, or at least startled her. Not that she would definitively have hesitated between the saving of her son's life and the facing of all the evils he had set before her; but she had not fully prepared her mind for such a decision. She had entered upon her present task with the idea that the too visible progress of the heart-break which was killing her darling,

might be arrested by coaxing his secret from him, and administering a certain amount of hope for the future. But the magnitude and weight of the matter in hand had grown suddenly far greater than she had anticipated. She was at the bottom of her heart ready to pay any price that might be needed for the object she had in view ; but the price was suddenly seen to be far greater than she had imagined. Yet after a few moments of rapid thought, the mother proceeded bravely on her path. But that she might gain time to arrange her own thoughts, and consider a little the best mode of replying to his solemn adjurations, as well as to allow the excitement and tension of his mind in some degree to subside, she said, speaking softly, and again taking his hot hand in hers, and looking with loving sympathy into his face : " Tell me, my own Ippolito, how it fell out that thou wast thus smitten with love of Dianora de' Bardi ? Have any words or love-tokens passed between the girl and thee ? Is she very fair ? "

" Words or love-tokens, mother ! Do you not understand, then, that from the very first I knew my fate as well as I know it now ? The same instant that gave me the knowledge of her name, told me all the helplessness of my passion. I knew then that life was over for me, a little sooner or a little later. Is she very fair ? you say. Ah ! mother, mother ! "—and he shut his eyes as the vision, which, more or less effaced and defaced, lies nearer the surface or deeper down in the hearts and brains of each of us, passed across the field of his mental vision,—“ she is fair, and none other is fair to me ! I see no beauty in any other. She alone is beautiful !—all one perfect beautiful thought !—a vision, of which every feature and outline of form combines harmoniously to express the flawless beauty of the soul within ! Ah, me ! ah, me ! ’Twas thus it chanced, mother. It was on the eve of St. John’s Day, now more than a month ago,—a month of weary days and nights all blank and helpless !—I went into the blessed Baptist’s Church for the vigil of the festival ; and there I took the hurt, from which there is no healing. She came

in a few minutes after me, with an aged lady, her grandmother, as I afterwards learned, the Contessa Anna de' Bardi, and they took their seats on a bench at right angles with the one on which I sat, just where the evening light streamed into the darksome church through the open doors. Ah! that kneeling form, and face upturned as she prayed, just in the centre of the patch of light! But there was preaching afterwards; and 'twas then I sate and learned by heart not only the outward figure of her beauty, but every lovely lineament of the corresponding soul within. It was a friar preaching the crusade against the infidel; and he spoke well. He told us of noble deeds of Christian chivalry done in old times on the distant sands of Palestine, of knightly prowess, and of Christian self-sacrifice; and I marked the reflection of every generous emotion in that peerless face. He told how the companions of the great Godfrey left lands, and home, and wealth, and ease, to rear the holy cross in triumph where it was once reared for the sacrifice of our blessed Lord; and I watched the ready enthusiasm which sparkled in her eyes, and made the generous blood mantle in her cheek. When he spoke of piteous wrongs suffered by Christian prisoners at the hands of the Moslem, I saw the sympathy of her gentle heart express itself in every plastic feature; I saw the tear-drop gather in her eloquent eye; I saw the quiver of the beautifully curved lip. For an hour, mother, I sate like a man entranced, watching all this, myself unseen, or at least unmarked, in the obscurity that was all round the space of light caused by the open doors. I knew not who she was. But when the friar ended his sermon, and she rose and followed the old lady she was with from the church, I too went out, and seeing Carlo Donati there, I asked him if he knew her. 'Those are the Contessa Anna dei Bardi and her grand-daughter Dianora,' he told me. And then I knew that it was mortal poison I had been drinking in at long draughts during that fatal hour. That is how it came about, mother, that I loved Dianora dei Bardi."

There was again a pause of some minutes, during which Monna Lisabetta was anxiously thinking how best to play the game that was on her hands, while Ippolito was waiting for her reply to his solemn appeal. At last he added, looking up with earnest eyes into her face:—

“And now, mother, I ask again, whether, in truth and in earnest, it is your counsel to me to endeavour to make Dianora dei Bardi mine, despite every man and every woman bearing either her name or mine in Florence?”

“Not despite every woman that bears thy name, my son,” replied Monna Lisabetta at length, quietly and resolutely, returning his steadfast gaze as she spoke. “Thy mother will stand on thy side, even though all the world should stand on the other. Why should love be held of no account, and all our submission and respect be reserved for hate? Rather than see thee, my Ippolito, as thou art now, I would welcome to my home and my heart a less desirable daughter-in-law than Dianora de’ Bardi. And I think that I can take it upon me to obtain thy dear father’s forgiveness and blessing on the marriage. Thy father knows what love is, my Ippolito. He did not marry for his party, or even for his family, but for the happiness of his own heart, and I trust he has found it!”

“My mother! my own mother! you give me new life! I dared not to hope this! But still, can I, dare I, hope for success in such a quest? The haughty Bardi will not look on such a matter with the eyes of my own gentle, loving mother!”

“You must dare more than hope, my son! You must dare to act, and to brave the anger of the Bardi. Win Dianora, my Ippolito! Win your love, my own golden-haired boy!” said the young mother, fondly stroking with her soft slender hand the silky curling locks of the handsome lad, and gazing with infinite love on the cheeks to which the excitement of newly-born hope was already bringing back the colour of health. “Win your bride, and bring her to Casa Buondelmonti, and let old Bardo Bardi and her kinsfolk do their worst!”

“But, ah! mother! that winning! Can I hope to win her love? Can I hope that so peerless a creature will bestow herself on me? and that in despite of all difficulties, in the teeth of all her kin, in the certainty of incurring their bitterest hate! Is this possible, my mother?”

“Try it, my son! Were it a question of wooing old Bardo to forget his family feud, or even the Contessa Anna, our Dianora’s venerable grandmother, I might give the matter up in despair. Perhaps if it fell to *me* to court the consent of the fair damsel, I might fail to move her. But I have a notion that a tongue I wot of might prove more persuasive. This at least I know, that when some twenty years or more ago I listened to such wooing, from just such an one as thou art now, my Ippolito, no fear of what any one else in all the wide world might say in the matter would have induced me to say that wooer, nay! And if, indeed, thy Dianora be the gentle loving heart thou deem’st her, methinks, my son, thy wooing will not be in vain.”

“But how to find a chance even of speaking to her, mother mine! How am I, a Buondelmonte, to set about wooing a Bardi damsel?”

“Did love ever fail to find a way, boy? Besides, Dianora Bardi has no mother to watch and plot against us; and thou hast one to plot for thee, my Ippolito. But this needs thinking on. It suffices me for the present that I have brought back some colour into my boy’s cheek. You will get up, will not, you, my Ippolito? Trust me, all will go well! All shall go well! All the Bardi in Florence shall not prevent us from winning and wearing the lovely Dianora! And now, my son, I leave you to plot and to think. This evening we will talk again. Courage, my son! All shall go well!”

And with these words the brave, loving mother left her son’s chamber, having very satisfactorily accomplished the task of arousing him from his despairing lethargy, and putting the new life of hope into his veins,—which was what she had taken in hand to do, with the fixed determination to succeed at all costs; but nevertheless, not a

little alarmed at the recollection of all she had pledged herself to perform, at the audacity of the counsels she had given, and the heavy responsibility she had taken upon herself; and, as may be imagined, not quite so sanguine at the bottom of her anxious mother's heart, as she had thought it needful for the success of her object to appear.

CHAPTER III.

THE AMBUSH.

THE result of a solitary hour spent by Monna Lisabetta in meditation on all that had passed in the conversation between her and her son was, that at "the fresh hour" that same evening, the lady on her palfrey, attended by two mounted servants, was seen passing out of the city by the San Frediano gate. It is the gate by which the old Leghorn road, in the ante-railroad days, left Florence, skirting on its course the right-hand bank of the Arno. At the distance of a mile or two from the city, a little beyond the picturesque convent and woods of Monte Oliveto, the road passes by the foot of a series of knolls, offering admirable sites for several of those now innumerable villas, of which many, even at the distant date of the present narrative, dotted the olive-covered hills around Florence. On one of these, called then, as now, Montecelli, there was, then as now, a villa, which was the lady Lisabetta's destination on the occasion in question. She was intending to visit an old friend, who lived there, —a lady with whom, as it would seem, she had of late years held but little intercourse. The chroniclers who have recorded the incidents of this story, have omitted to mention the name of this friend. But it is probable that the friendship dated from the maiden life of the Buondelmonte lady, as we are told that the inhabitant of the Montecelli

villa was a friend of the Bardi family also; and there was little likelihood, therefore, that the Guelphic dame had seen much of one having such connections since her Buondelmonte marriage.

The object of Monna Lisabetta's ride out of the city, and her visit to her old friend may be readily divined. It will be understood also that the negociation on which she wished to enter was a delicate one. But fortunately, let the lady of the Montecelli villa have been whom she may, we hear nothing of any master of that mansion. The lady may have been a widow. Her lord may have been in exile as a Ghibelline. Or he may have habitually held such a marital position in the Montecelli household, as made it unnecessary to take any heed of him in regard to the matters in hand. In any case we cannot but think it fortunate for the success of the lady Lisabetta's object that the whole of her business seems to have been transacted on this occasion with one of her own sex untrammelled by masculine interference. Except in certain cases of very unpleasantly strong-minded specimens of the sex, a romantic match-making scheme in defiance of difficulties is, Heaven be thanked! more likely to interest feminine sympathies than the maintenance of hereditary hatreds and respect for family feuds. Our far better halves have their little weaknesses; and if the venerable octogenarian Contessa Anna dei Bardi had been a beautiful matron in the prime of life, with a finer gold brocaded dress, a grander set of pearls, and a selecter circle of fashionable acquaintances than the ladies engaged in scheming an alliance with her grand-daughter,—why then indeed those gentle breasts might not have been inaccessible to feelings of rancour. But in the absence of any such legitimate causes of hatred, the pleasures of forwarding a little bit of clandestine love-making were quite likely to outweigh the claims of old dead-and-gone causes of hostility. And in such matters it is to be supposed that the thirteenth century, despite all other changes, does not very materially differ from the nineteenth.

The nature of the interview, between the anxious and enterprising mother and her friend, may be easily imagined ;—the description of her Ippolito's piteous condition ; the fond maternal detail of his perfections ; the pity, the shame, the sin of blighting if not prematurely destroying so dear a life, for the sake of perpetuating a feud the origin of which was long since forgotten ; and finally, when the sympathy of her listener had been obtained, the courageous mother's determination to brave all the prejudices and anger of both families, and bring about if possible the union which could alone restore her boy to happiness, despite them all.

In short Monna Lisabetta pleaded well to a sympathising ear, and won her cause, so far as to induce her friend to arrange with her the following plan of their campaign in the service of Hymen. An annual village festival in the immediate neighbourhood of the Montecelli Villa was to take place in a few days. Every village celebrates such on the anniversary of its patron saint ; and in the good old times, when saints were revered, and pleasures were simple, these joy-days and the amusements incidental to them were participated in by all classes of society. Now all such vulgar cakes and ale are left to the rustics, who can still find flavour in them. At the time of our story it was quite in accordance with Florentine habits and ideas, that the lady of Montecelli should invite a party of her city friends to spend that day at the villa, and take part in all the religious and mundane dissipation provided for the occasion. This she undertook to do ; and specially to take care that Dianora de' Bardi should be of the party. It is to be presumed that the other guests were mostly if not entirely Ghibelline ; for the members of the two great parties mingled little and rarely in social intercourse. But it is probable that the two experienced ladies in making up their lists of the younger of the cavaliers to be invited, exercised a judicious discretion, which might have resulted in leading the pretty Dianora to find the revel a dull one, had the day been suffered to come to

a conclusion unbroken by any extraordinary and abnormal incident.

But such, as it will be understood, was not intended by the fair plotters to be the case. Early in the morning of the festival, Ippolito was to steal out unobserved to the villa. There his friendly hostess undertook to find him a concealment, and further, so to arrange matters, as that he should at some moment or other during the day have an opportunity of pleading his cause to the arbitress of it with a fair stage and no favour, save such as his own eloquence could create for himself in her bosom.

The triumphant mother rode home to Florence in the gloaming a happier woman, than when she had set forth on her errand. As far as winning the maiden went, her mother's heart deemed, that that part of the business was as good as done, as soon as a fair opportunity of wooing was secured for her fair-haired boy. Easy to imagine too the triumph with which at her return she told him of her successful plottings; the delight with which she watched the brightening of his eye, and the salutary effects of that fine tonic, hope.

And to the surprise of all his family, except his mother, Ippolito began to recover from his unaccountable malady as rapidly and as mysteriously as he had been prostrated by it; above all to the surprise and mystification of his learned doctors, who shook their heads with quite as unsatisfied an air as before, quoted their Latin as abundantly, and quarrelled more violently over this undue and abnormal convalescence than they had over the equally puzzling malady.

By the time the day of the Montecelli festival had arrived, no trace of languor or recent illness were visible in the features or bearing of the ardent lover. He was up with the lark; and at once plunged into the arduous and important business of arraying himself for conquest. This was a less simple matter in those days than in our sad-coloured epoch; for the choice both of form and colour was greater; and in the latter particular ranged through

every hue of the rainbow. But the ruling mind, which presided at the business, the little coxcombries, the diffidences, the satisfactions, and the meditations were precisely the same in the thirteenth as they would have been in the nineteenth century. Suffice it then that the result was a success. Let the reader imagine a tall, slender, well-formed figure, clothed in perfectly tight-fitting raiment of the brightest and most delicate tints; a fair, handsome face with a barely perceptible line of nascent moustache on the upper lip, a large and frank blue eye, and a round flat cap of brilliant colour with a white feather in it, surmounting a quantity of sunny bright hair, escaping from under it in long wavy locks over his neck and shoulders. Let the reader imagine him thus, as he leaped on his horse in the early dawn, anxious to be out of the city gate before the citizens began to come forth from their houses to matins; and it may be conceded, that Monna Lisabetta was not far wrong in thinking, that if her boy could only get a fair chance to whisper his love tale into a maiden's ear, the chances were strongly in favour of his not doing so in vain.

On reaching the Villa at Montecelli, though it was still very early morning, he found his hostess evidently on the look out for him. They were, up to that time, strangers to each other; for, as has been remarked, the intercourse between the lady and Monna Lisabetta had been broken off for many years; and as for the last three or four days since his mother's visit to Montecelli, it had been deemed prudent for obvious reasons that Ippolito should not present himself there in this interval.

The lady of the Villa received him with a smile, which might with probability be interpreted as an adhesion to the opinion of his mother, that in that first phase of the matter to be that day decided, the chances were very much in his favour.

"I fear me, Messer Ippolito," she said as she conducted him to the apartment she destined for his retreat, "that you must be condemned to durance for sundry weary hours.

The folks from the village will soon be here, and not long after them our friends from the city. So it will be well that you betake you to your retirement. See, now! In this room you will be safe from all intrusion. This window looks upon the garden, which will doubtless be haunted by some of our visitors during the day. That is as much as to say that you must not exhibit yourself at it. This door communicates with another chamber, see! And to that chamber it shall be my business to contrive, that a certain lady shall retire to seek repose during some hour of the day. And care shall be taken, that she be alone. The rest, fair sir, must be left to your own powers. Precisely at what hour this little plot can be put into execution I cannot say. You must await with such patience as you may the hour of your opportunity. I do not charge you, sir knight, not to sleep at your post! So now, for the present, adieu, and happy fortune attend you!"

And so saying the hostess hurried away to attend to the many duties which the festivities of the annual gala day imposed upon her.

Very soon, as she had said, the house began to be filled with the villagers and neighbours, and a variety of presents were brought,—all eatables or drinkables of some sort or other, fowls, cheese, fruit, wine,—by those who expected to be invited to join the feast that day at the villa. Then shortly afterwards the city folk began to arrive; and after a short space of greetings and chattering and laughter among the young, and news-discussing among the old, the ceremony of the festival mass in the parish church had to be attended; and the never-failing procession afterwards to be gone through. And the city gentlemen and ladies did not take their part in the ceremony as if they were rather ashamed of being seen by each other so engaged, and with a sort of silent protest in their bearing, to the effect that they joined in such follies merely from benevolent condescendence to the prejudices of the rustics. Not so at all in those days. All took their part in perfect

seriousness; took pride in carrying their candles with mingled elegance and devotion; and vied with each other in lending their voices to swell the wailing litany chant, which rose from the field-paths among the vines, and the stone-paved village roads among the hills, as the long procession made its annual circuit. Then the young men employed the interval, till the noon-tide repast was ready, in trying against each other their skill in that very ancient pastime, which consists in so throwing a circular piece of wood, about a foot in diameter, from a thong coiled round it, as to make it continue its rolling course as far and in as straight a line as possible. The game was a very old one in the thirteenth century; but it may still be witnessed on the roads in the vicinity of Florence on a *festa* day; though it has in these days been wholly abandoned, like so much else, to the youth of the plebeian classes, who are in their turn rapidly leaving it to the children. But in those simpler times no young man in Florence scorned to prove the strength and steadiness of his arm by his skill in the popular game; and patrician damsels were well pleased to watch and applaud the players.

And some of those gathered that day at Montecelli amused themselves in this manner; while another company, sweeping round a corner of the house with an accompaniment of silvery laughter and many-voiced chattering, came to the green shady nook of garden beneath the window of the chamber where our friend Ippolito was keeping his vigil.

He heard the pleasant sound of the musical girlish voices, and felt certain that the one voice, which to him was worth all the music of all earthly sounds, was amongst them. The temptation to peep from his window was irrepressibly great; but it would never do to ruin all his enterprise by risking detection in his hiding-place. On looking about him, however, to find if there were any possibility of contriving to see without being seen, he observed that there was, above the window, a roll of matting intended to serve as a defence against the sun, when at a later hour of the

day it beat on that side of the house. Cautiously and quietly therefore, and taking care not to stand before the window, he let this down; and then paused to listen whether the change attracted the notice of the party on the grass beneath. But the merry chattering went on in the same tones, and the covey did not seem to have been the least disturbed. Then he ventured, with every precaution against making the least noise, to open such an interstice between the reeds of the mat as should enable him to bring an eye to bear on the group outside.

After two or three ineffectual trials he succeeded in accomplishing this and there sure enough was Dianora in the centre of a little knot of some half dozen other girls.

The first idea that rushed into his mind was that it was a good sign that she was there, rather than among those who were looking on at the sports of the young men. Had there been any one among them in whom she felt any interest, she would not have been among the apparently fancy-free group, who preferred a chattering match among themselves to the company of the lords of creation. His second thought was that all his ever-present recollections of her as she had appeared to him in the church on the eve of St. John, did very scant justice to her radiant beauty. She had then been dressed entirely in sad-coloured raiment, and a loose mantle over her shoulders had allowed the perfect symmetry of her figure to be divined rather than fully appreciated. Now on the present gala occasion, though the form of her dress was still simple, as that of Florentine maidens at that period invariably was, it was gay in colour; and the absence of any mantle or veil enabled her lover's eager eye to dwell with delight on the outlines of the bust and slender rounded waist, as set forth by the long close-fitting robe, which reached from her neck to her feet. On the previous memorable occasion of his seeing her in the church, Ippolito had had ample opportunity, as he had related to his mother, of studying her features in all their more serious and elevated expressions.

Now he was able to note them in their lighter humour. For those forming the little group of girls beneath his window were evidently in mirthful mood, and Dianora was as evidently the leading spirit of the merry company. He anxiously strained his ear to distinguish the individual tones of her voice; but it was as difficult to do so, as it is to attribute its own special note to each warbler in a bush full of singing birds. All talked and laughed at once; and the sounds which reached the imprisoned knight's ears were as pleasingly musical, but as undistinguishable and meaningless, as those of so many nightingales.

But after awhile there came round the corner of the house, twanging a cithern as he walked, one of those vagabond "poets" whose business it was at every festal meeting to amuse the lads and lasses with versified novellettes and legends, often extempore, or partially so, sung to the accompaniment of one of those hump-backed guitar-looking instruments, which Giotto's angels so frequently have in their hands. Forthwith the greater number of the party of girls clustered round him, like bees round a sugar-barrel, and followed him off to a seat beneath a great chesnut tree at some little distance. But to Ippolito's infinite delight Dianora, together with a tall fair girl, a year or two her senior, whom the watcher recognised as a certain Laura Amidei, lagged behind; and remained in converse, which appeared to take a more serious turn.

The prettily contrasted pair, as soon as the others had moved off, began slowly walking backwards and forwards across the bit of turf beneath the window, with their arms round each other's waists; and ever and anon, as they passed in their walk beneath the window, Ippolito was able to catch a few words of their discourse. The feeling that he ought not to have done so, let it be understood, is the improved product of a more advanced stage of civilisation. He was prevented by no such delicacy from striving to the utmost to overhear the two girls' talk; but he did so not from any desire to know the subject of their conversation,

but simply for the pleasure of hearing the accents of his mistress.

The subject matter of their discourse, however, was in itself not a little interesting to him; and it is doubtful whether what he heard was calculated more to raise or to depress his hopes.

"Nay, dearest, surely you are too severe!" said the other voice,—that of pretty Laura Amidei; "surely you do not make due allowance. Truly it is difficult to do so for feelings which one has never known!"

"That is quite true, my Laura!" returned Dianora gravely; "perhaps it is more than difficult. Perhaps it is impossible. I am an inexperienced counsellor in these matters. Other love than that of my parents, as you truly say, I have never "

And here slowly sauntering, the two girls passed out of earshot. Then again as they repassed beneath the window, he heard again the voice of Dianora.

" the possible consequences, let us think of the certain consequences,—the anger and ill-will of all your family. Can you think of facing so dreadful a penalty?"

"Ah! *Dianora mia!* I love him better a thousand times than a thousand families! I am proud of my love! What would I not face "

And here again the speaker passed out of hearing of the now doubly anxious ear at the window. When they passed again, neither of the girls was speaking; but they paused in their walk just beneath the window, both apparently in deep thought. Presently Dianora spoke.

"The blessed Madonna only knows what any one of us might do in circumstances which we have never been tried in, but it does seem to me, my friend, that no new love could have force so to push out the old, as to lead me to fly in the face of my parents. And I have no mother, Laura. Had I one, methinks it would be doubly impossible to me to do aught that should afflict her! Still, *Laura mia*, if you decide on acting otherwise, do not suppose that I shall take it on myself to think, much less to say, that

you have done wrong. But you have asked me for my thoughts on the subject; and I have given them to you freely."

"Thanks! my own good Dianora! May you never have to choose between. "

And at that point of their talk, the picturesquely grouped pair moved off to join their companions, whose ringing laughter came in gusts from the circle they had formed around the minstrel under the chesnut tree.

Here was food enough for meditation, to occupy our anxious lover during the hours it behoved him still to remain in durance. On the one hand he gathered from what he had heard, that the queen of his heart was yet mistress of her own, and fancy-free. And one terrible ground of anxiety was thus removed from his mind. But on the other hand he had heard her profess feelings and opinions, which, unless he could vanquish them by some stronger sentiment, must be fatal to all his hopes. Again and again he asked himself whether upon the whole his case was improved, or the reverse, by the conversation he had chanced to overhear. And though he would not to his own heart admit as much, he could not divest himself of a lurking consciousness that the balance of the matter was in his favour. Had another already made himself master of her heart, there was an end to every possibility of hope. But if only he could succeed in securing for himself that vacant lordship, he could not but feel it probable that the example of Laura Amidei might grow in importance in her mind, while her own arguments and preachment on the subject might be forgotten.

And as he mused, the time for putting his speculations to the proof drew near. It was nearly noon, when Dianora and Laura had rejoined the circle of their companions; and at that hour was the great ceremony of the day, the long-protracted dinner. He heard the great bell ring to summon the guests from all sides to the hall; and after that the house became quite quiet. Presently there came a light foot to the door of his chamber; and a maid servant

entered, bringing him food and wine. And though he declared that he needed them not, and had no mind to eat;—yet he did eat and drink, and justified the good care of his hostess by feeling after he had done so, that he was more capable of carrying to a good issue the work before him, than if he had remained “sine Cerere et Baccho.”

The dinner lasted for nearly three hours; and at the end of it the July day was at the hottest. In the evening the holiday keepers would of course dance; but between the end of dinner and “the twenty-four,” there were hours which all were glad to give up to a siesta. And Ippolito knew that the time was come when his cause was to be pleaded, and his fate decided.

Meantime the friendly mistress of the Villa, mindful of her promised aid, was arranging matters accordingly. Of the gentlemen, when the awfully long repast was at length brought to a conclusion, some betook themselves to the shade of a cypress grove which surrounded two sides of the house, some went to sit in the more perfectly cool atmosphere of the village church, and some of the elders adjourned for a little quiet discourse to a shady “loggia” in front of it. The ladies dispersed themselves, some to repose, and some to chat, in the different rooms of the mansion. One bevy of special intimates, the lady of the villa carried off to her own bower. To some she offered the accommodation of retiring to a quiet chamber for an hour or so of repose in preparation for the anticipated fatigue of the evening. And in the course of these arrangements, due care was taken that the lady Dianora dei Bardi should find her way to the chamber destined for her, and that she should have it to herself.

“Let us go together, *Laura mia*,” said she to the friend with whom she had been talking before dinner; “I would fain have some further talk with thee of the matter we were speaking of this morning.”

But the kindly perfidious hostess was on the watch to prevent the occurrence of any such obstacle to her plan.

“Nay! *carissima Dianora*; *Laura* must come with me.

I have been waiting for this quiet hour to have a little talk with her. And I assured the venerable Contessa Anna that you should break the fatigue of our long day's festa here by a good siesta. Indeed I shall not keep Laura long; for a little sleep will do us all good, before we begin our evening amusements."

So the gentle Dianora was overruled; and consigned in solitude to the fatal chamber, where her destiny was awaiting her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WOOING.

IPPOLITO, whose ears were on the watch for the slightest sound on the other side of the partition which divided the two chambers, heard her enter; heard the voice of their hostess, wishing her pleasant repose as she left her—(laughing in her sleeve no doubt as she did so;)—and heard the closing of the door, which shut in the mistress of his heart and fate in complete solitude in the room next to him. The hour so ardently longed for was come at last; and now so violent was his agitation, so painfully strong the beating of his heart, that he would fain have deferred the enterprise before him a little longer. But he had no means of knowing how long the opportunity contrived for him by so much scheming might last. It behoved him to lose none of the precious moments accorded him! It flashed across his mind moreover, that if he delayed till Dianora should have laid herself on the bed, as she probably would, his sudden appearance before her would be the more likely to offend and startle her. It was best therefore to lose no time in thinking about it, but make the desperate plunge at once.

He did so. She had stepped to the window to arrange

the matting, so as most effectually to exclude the rays of the afternoon sun; and was busy with this somewhat difficult task as he entered.

She started slightly as she heard the door open, and half turned towards the intruder, without taking her hands from the matter they were engaged in. She supposed that having opened the door by mistake he would retire on finding the chamber occupied. But seeing that on the contrary he proceeded to shut the door behind him, she said:—

“Excuse me, Messer Cavaliere, but you have mistaken your room. This chamber has been assigned to me by our hostess for my *siesta*!”

“And this other room by the side of it, lady, was assigned to me,” said Ippolito, still standing near the door by which he had entered, and scarcely venturing to lift his eyes to her face. “I have concealed myself there since daybreak this morning, in expectation of this opportunity of speaking to you.”

Now it would be untrue to say that the lady Dianora dei Bardi had been thinking ever since that fatal 24th of June of the handsome cavaliere she had seen on that afternoon in the church of St. John, as he had been thinking of her. But she *had* seen him upon that occasion, though he *was* in the shade, while she was seated in the sun. She had seen him, and had confessed to her own heart that, to her eye and imagination, he was the most complete embodiment of her beau idéal that had ever yet been presented to them; and though exemplarily attentive to her devotions, as good girls are, she was yet perfectly aware that he had never taken his eyes off her during the service—as good girls will be aware of such circumstances, be their eyes never so immovably rivetted to their Prayer-books, Mass-books, or Korans, as the case may be. She had, moreover, found means of informing herself of his name; but having learned it, she had at once dismissed with a sigh every trace of the nascent little romance, of which maiden fancy had begun to weave the first delicate fila-

ments; feeling, as a leal daughter of the Bardi should, that between her and a Buondelmonti there could never be anything in common.

But now, when she looked on him again, as he stood there just inside the door, not daring to advance into the room, and heard his blunt avowal that he had been waiting in ambush there to surprise her, all the scotched, but not quite killed, romance suddenly came to life again in her mind, pleading hard to be continued from that point at which it had been so remorselessly cut short.

As for Ippolito, the audacious declaration of his object, and of the means he had adopted to attain it, which he had ventured on, had been the result neither of calculated policy nor of boldness, but simply of desperation, and a feeling that there was nothing for it but to plunge head foremost into the deepest of the deep water before him at once.

Dianora did not to her own inmost heart pretend to doubt for an instant what was the nature of the communication this scion of the house of Buondelmonti had to make to her. And it was clear to her that the old family feud had not appeared to him so utterly an insuperable obstacle as it had done to her.

In truth, the whole of the coming interview, and of the result of it as regarded their position towards each other, seemed to reveal itself to her by a sudden flash of intuition. She felt quite sure that he loved her, and she was conscious of a prophetic feeling that she should very shortly love him; and a sort of half awe-struck, half pleasingly excited feeling took possession of her mind, at the idea of the strange things that might arise out of the wonderful destiny that fate seemed to have in store for her.

Of course she would not have allowed to her own conscience in her most secret meditations that she foresaw and expected all this; but none the less was it the truth that for a moment she saw it all, as by a lightning flash of revelation.

It behoved her, however, at the present stage of the

matter, if not to be, at least to appear, offended at Ippolito's conduct and candid avowal.

So the little beauty drew herself up to the full height of her exquisitely symmetrical little figure, and arched her pretty neck proudly, as she said :—

“This to me, sir!—a daughter of the Bardi! The maidens of our house, sir, are not wont to receive communications from strangers, save under their own roof-tree, and the protection of their family!”

“Would to God, lady, that it had been possible for me so to address you! I could have desired no greater happiness!” returned poor Ippolito. “But such a fortune,” he continued, with a deep sigh and downcast eyes, “was not to be hoped for by Ippolito Buondelmonte.”

And he stole an anxious look at her face as he spoke the fatal words, to see the effect. But he did not perceive the start of surprise and dismay which he had anticipated. She was above the petty hypocrisy of seeking to improve her position, either for the purposes of coquetry or defence, by pretending to be taken aback by the announcement of a fact of which she was well aware.

But she shook her head sorrowfully, and looked up at him with a sad and almost reproachful glance, as she said :—

“Ought not that name, Ser Cavaliere, to have made it equally impossible for you to address Dianora dei Bardi here, as to have sought speech of her openly with the sanction of her family?”

“Lady, no! Not so!” returned Ippolito, with increasing boldness. “Did I seek to say aught unbefitting the ear of the noblest and most maidenly lady in Florence, no reprobation, no punishment could suffice for the baseness of having plotted and watched this opportunity of doing so! Think not, lady, that a Buondelmonte is capable of offering to you an offence which no gentleman of the Bardi would be guilty of towards a friend, or would pardon from an enemy. No, lady! all that I entreat you to permit me to say to you might be said in the hearing of saints and men!”

The colour mounted into the cheeks and brow of Dianora at these words; and she spoke more coldly and haughtily than she had hitherto done, as she signified to him that he might say whatever required and deserved to be so prefaced.

What was the cause of that very unmistakeable change of manner in the lady? Why did the blood fly to cheek and forehead? Was it that an idea rushed into her mind that perhaps, after all, she had mistaken the (very reprehensible) object of the conference so strangely demanded of her? Was it that, having imagined she was about to hear a tale of a kind not usually adapted to advantageous telling before saints and men, there was a certain amount of disappointment at finding, as she supposed, that the matter in hand must be of a different kind, and that this disappointment occasioned her very perceptibly less kindly manner towards her interlocutor?

If so, she was shortly undeceived; and Ippolito's meaning and purpose placed beyond a doubt. It soon became clear enough that he was there to woo. But it appeared that under the peculiar circumstances of the case he had judged it best to plead his cause not wholly on those grounds, which are fitted exclusively to be whispered in a maiden's ear. As for him, the change in Dianora's manner was lost upon him, for the first awful plunge over he was so warmed by his enthusiasm as to be eager only to pour out all his heart before her.

"Yes," he resumed, "I maintain that the name I bear is a reason the more for my venturing to address Dianora dei Bardi; and that, in addition to all that another might urge in suing for a love that would make the happiness of any man, I may appeal to motives worthy of all good men's approbation. The feud between our families! Is it never to cease? Is hatred placed between us by the decree of nature, as between creatures of a different kind? Surely not so; or Heaven would not have permitted me, before I knew your name, to be stricken to the heart by such a love as the heart knows instinctively it can feel but

once, and for one object. But when feeling this I learned your name, and saw at once all the difficulties and the obstacles that reared themselves between me and you, then, Dianora, I despaired. Yes! you shall know all the strength of my passion, and all the weakness of my courage. I despaired, and went home to lay me down and die! 'Twas on the eve of St. John. You were at the sermon in the baptistery;—do you remember it?—and you little thought that within a few feet of you there, in the obscurity of the shade, seeing but not seen, there was one drinking in as he gazed on every expression of your changing features, long draughts of intoxicating passion, which were to be to him a deadly poison, or an elixir of life! And when I learned that she who was thenceforth for evermore the mistress of my heart, was called Dianora dei Bardi, then I despaired, and came near to die. It was all in vain the learned doctors took counsel on my case. Of course it was. They could not know the nature of my ailment. And surely, Dianora, I had died, had it not been for one who was clearer-sighted than they,—my mother! You have no mother, Dianora. Ah! share mine. Such a mother's heart; and yearning even now to open itself to the love of a daughter. My mother guessed the nature of my pain. None but a woman could have done so. She gently, lovingly stole my secret from me; and then, when I thought to have seen her terrified at the love of a Buondelmonte for a Bardi, she bade me hope;—she bade me rise from the bed on which I was dying;—tell the object of my love that my heart, my soul, my life were in her hands, and implore her, as she could feel for the bereavement of a mother, to save them. She bade me bring home a wife of the Bardi to a place in her mother's heart. She urged me to close the feud between our houses by doing so.

“Was it not a good and holy bidding, lady? Think how the city is even now torn and well-nigh ruined by feud and senseless hatred. Will it not be a good deed to heal in a great part these wounds? Think of the condition of

the country even at this present time! Numbers of its most noble citizens in exile! its commerce destroyed! its wealth diminished! its enemies rejoicing! discord and hatred raging on all sides, where love, concord, and union should be. Would it not be a great and worthy act which should give the first example of a determination on the part of the leading families in Florence to put an end to such a deplorable state of things? Is it not a noble ambition to be the means of so blessed a revolution? Would not our names—oh! suffer me to join them together in the contemplation of such a result!—would not our united names be told to the latest posterity in Florence, as those of the first who had nobly dared to set aside the old prejudices of family feud and hatred, and be the saviours of their native city?

“Was I wrong, dearest lady, in saying, that the name I bear was in truth a reason the more for daring to implore you to listen to what I have been all but dying from the burning desire to say to you?”

Once launched, Ippolito had spoken fervently, rapidly, and not without eloquence. He had advanced as far as the centre of the room towards her, but rather apparently from being moved by the subject matter of his discourse, than with any intention of approaching her. And now he stood with his hands clasped, and his body bent forwards, awaiting with wistful eyes the result of his appeal.

Dianora, who had remained half turned from him towards the window, and with downcast eyes, during the first part of their colloquy, had turned fully towards him, and lifted her face to his eye as he spoke. The sentiments he had expressed evidently found an echo in her heart; and the warm blush which mantled in her cheek was, for the moment, not the result of any maidenly bashfulness, but the kindling of the generous feeling of patriotism which he had sought to awaken.

But after a short pause a more personal feeling resumed its natural place in her bosom; and the flashing dark eyes were once again veiled and cast down as she replied, not

maiden's heart is that which binds her to her mother; and you have never known that sweetest of all loves, save one. But there is a mother's heart ready, nay, eager to receive you as a daughter, which can entirely appreciate the worth and nobleness of such considerations as we were speaking of but now."

"But, my father, Signor Cavaliere? My noble, but proud and stern father? His family and party feelings are very strong. And in truth he has no reason to love the Guelphs. Could any motive, ought any motive whatever, to induce me to risk bearing with me through life a father's curse instead of his blessing?" And, as she spoke, there was an urgency in her tone, and an expression of distress in her eye, which, rightly interpreted, might have told Ippolito that, if well fought, the day was his own, even despite the obstacles that presented themselves so painfully to Dianora's mind. But he did not perceive this; and had he done so, the noble nature of his love would have prompted him to prefer endeavouring to remove them, to using his advantage to over-ride them. So he replied, thoughtfully, after a pause:

"I think, dearest lady, that the noble Count, your father, would not be insensible to the weight of such considerations as those I have spoken of. He is too good a citizen and patriot to be so. Consider, also, the present position of the Ghibelline party, and the danger in which its leaders stand in the city at the present day. Think how all this might be changed by such a blessed reconciliation as we have been alluding to," he said, uttering the last words after a little pause, while their eyes met for an instant, and both blushed scarlet as he spoke them.

"If it were proposed to your father," he continued, recovering with some effort the calm thoughtfulness of his manner, "to obtain complete security and amnesty in the city for his family, by giving his daughter in marriage to a Guelph" here his eye again furtively sought hers, but this time her glance remained fixed on the ground

. . . . "it is no doubt most probable that many feelings would combine to make him spurn the proposition. But were such an alliance made without privity or consent of his, and were the hand of friendship and reconciliation then held out to him, those feelings would not equally stand in the way of his accepting it; and the manifest advantages such a reconciliation would, in the present state of things, bring with it, could not but plead powerfully in favour of his frankly doing so. Believe me," he added, "the temper of the citizens is in a dangerous mood; and the better-disposed of the Guelph leaders have little power to curb the excesses of the populace. The Ghibellines of note who have remained in the city are in great and daily danger.

I think," he added, earnestly and pleadingly, yet proudly at the same time, as he observed a quick movement of the head and a haughty glance of the Ghibelline maiden's flashing black eye, at this allusion to the position of her family's faction in the city "I think that you will do me the justice to believe me incapable of the thought even of suggesting an unworthy motive for granting what I would accept on no such terms. I only point out the reasons, which any man of sense and patriotism would see, in favour of any measure of reconciliation. You believe me in this, Dianora?"

"Yes, I believe you. But, Signor Cavaliere, you have not told me," said she, stealing a look at him from under her downcast eyelids, "you have not told me whether it was decided in a council of the venerable heads of the Guelph party, that I should be honoured by the propositions you have been making, with a view to mending matters in the political position of the country? Is there no other maiden of the Ghibellines to whom the patriotic part you propose to me might be more worthily assigned? Clara degli Uberti now, for instance, is a lady of more mark than I. Would not she do better for the purpose?"

And then Ippolito rushed forward and threw himself at her feet, as she still stood by the window, and, seizing her hand in his, poured forth all the love tale which had so

long been pent up in his heart ; went over again his lover's history,—how he had first seen her in the church on the eve of St. John ; how he had scanned every changing emotion which had passed over her features ; how, from that hour, his life had had but one object and one thought, &c., &c., &c., &c.

Of what use is it to repeat that ever-new oldest of old stories !

Uninterpreted by the running commentary with which the tellers of such tales are in the habit of accompanying them, it would be less intelligible than the very sensible observations with which Ippolito had prepared his way, and therefore less worth reporting. Suffice it that Dianora dei Bardi was well wooed and completely won by her Guelph lover, who did not content himself till he had insisted on a confession from Dianora that she was *not* altogether influenced by those grave and wise considerations which he had so sensibly set before her.

But after this confession had been insisted on, withheld, and at last accorded, much still remained to be said between the affianced pair. For, as the ancient chronicle runs, affianced they were before that first meeting came to an end. Nay, more ; the whole arrangements which led to the strange and striking events to be recounted in the sequel of this true tale, were then and there determined on between them. But a nineteenth century story-teller feels that to the nineteenth century maidens, whom he would fain interest in the story and fortunes of their thirteenth century Florentine sister, the rapidity and suddenness with which these steps were taken may appear somewhat startling. He would therefore observe (for his own sake, in the first place) that such *was* the case ; and (for Dianora's sake, in the second place) would suggest that the great simplicity of manners of that early period places so wide a divergence between our feelings on such subjects and those of the old Florentine republicans, as to prevent us from being able to form a fair judgment on such a point ; and, secondly, that some allowance may be made for the extreme urgency of

the circumstances of the case, and the difficulties the lovers had to contend with.

The fair hope that their union might be pardoned and accepted as an accomplished fact, was so evidently far greater than that it should be permitted while yet unaccomplished, that a secret marriage was, in truth, their only possible course. But the greatest difficulty remained to be surmounted. How was an opportunity for putting such a determination into execution to be found? After much canvassing of many plans, they came to the conclusion that no measure save a strong one would meet all the difficulties of the case; and it was finally settled between them, that a priest and proper witnesses should be in waiting at an altar belonging to the Buondelmonti in the chapel of the Servite convent of the Holy Trinity, on a night some ten days after the present time; that Ippolito should warn his mistress that all was prepared, by passing beneath her window in the Bardi Palace at a certain hour of that day; and that he should return, and, by means of the classical silk ladder, climb to her chamber in the dead of the night, and carry her off to her wedding.

And the kind hostess of the Montecelli Villa, when she observed that evening that Dianora was less animated in dancing than usual, said she feared that she had not profited by her siesta.

And Ippolito rode home in the twilight, a happier man than he had ridden forth in the morning; and recounted his success and communicated his plans to his mother, who hardly knew whether most to rejoice or tremble at the entire and prompt success of her own schemes.

CHAPTER V.

THE FAILURE.

ON the day, and at the hour which had been agreed upon, Ippolito passed down the Via dei Bardi, as a signal to Dianora that everything was prepared, that all went well, and that the proposed escape was to take place, as had been arranged, that night. The little lady was at her window a good hour before the time that had been agreed on; and though she knew that he, on whom she was longing to look once again, could not come yet, she could not refrain from continually gazing up and down the narrow streets with a feverish restlessness, which might well have aroused suspicion, had any one chanced to observe her. But it was the hour of the siesta, and the streets of Florence were little less still and deserted than those of Palmyra.

At length she heard the bell in the tower of the Bargello strike the hour for which she was waiting. And within five minutes afterwards she saw him coming by the street which leads from the Ponte alle Grazie into the Via dei Bardi, almost opposite to the grim old palace, from which the street was named.

She, from the shelter of her chamber, ventured to kiss her hand to him as he neared the house. But prudence forbade him to risk any such demonstration. He could but exchange a hurried glance, as he passed beneath the window; but it sufficed to assure them both that all went well, and that the flight was to be accomplished as fixed, an hour after midnight that same night.

About twelve hours after this mute meeting, Ippolito was again in the streets of Florence, and the city was again all still and silent. For the thrifty citizens on the banks of the Arno were, as they still are to the present day, early in their habits. And especially as things were in

Florence at the time of our history, there was little temptation for honest men to be in the streets after night-fall, but on the contrary strong reasons for preferring to find themselves within their own barred windows, and triply bolted doors.

Yet there were men enough in Florence to whom such an expedition as Ippolito was bound on, would have been nothing very new or strange. For the times were lawless, and lovers were adventurous. Many a window was scaled in Florence for the sake of the bright eyes that flashed from it;—many also for the sake of less sentimental and less pardonable robbery;—some too, occasionally, for purposes of still darker crime. The dissensions which had recently divided the city into two hostile camps, and the popular tumults to which these dissensions had given rise, had of course had the effect of increasing all such lawless doings. The general insecurity had led to special efforts for the repression of all such offences. And of course no means to this end were known or dreamed of, save the good old simple plan of lopping off offending heads in the speediest and most summary manner.

But the most vigorous application of that nostrum was not found to have the effect of placing either the money bags, or the wives and daughters, or the throats of society in security. And nightly attacks on all these things were numerous in Florence.

But Ippolito was wholly new to anything of the sort; and when he found himself, for the first time in his life, engaged on a lawless errand, and skulking like a malefactor through the silent midnight street, his feelings were far from being agreeable. If all went well,—if Dianora were safely got out of her paternal home, safely brought to the chapel where all was prepared to make her lawfully his own, and constitute him her legal protector,—he felt that he could face the world, and was sanguine that all would end well. But it was only the completion of the deed that was to justify it. Cut short in the middle, how would the matter appear? If he were caught in the act of

climbing to the lady's chamber, what would become of her reputation and of her? If he fell into the hands of the night watch, might he not pass for an ordinary house-breaker, furnished as he was with the proper implements for such a trade? Indeed, would it not be best that he should do so? Would not such an hypothesis be the only means of saving Dianora?

To our notions it seems out of the question, that a scion of one of the principal noble families of the city should be suspected of leaving his father's house by night on a burglarious expedition. But this is a result of a different stage of civilisation and social manners. Lawlessness was in those days by no means a peculiarity of the lowest ranks of society. *All* the classes were "dangerous classes" in the good old times. Robbery by violence was by no means an ignoble thing. And, though the civic and commercial spirit of Florence was rapidly correcting the public mind and morals in this respect, the days when the noblest in the land had been the rieving and robbing territorial barons, were too recent, and the countries where such was still the state of things were too near at hand, for the simple circumstance of patrician blood and high social station to be accepted as any strong presumption of innocence in such a matter.

Ippolito had crossed the Ponte Vecchio, not then, as now, bordered by jewellers' shops, which would have made it a specially dangerous locality for a midnight lurker with a rope ladder about him, but by the stalls of the butchers, which were little calculated to give rise to any such suspicion. He had descended from the bridge, and was just turning into the narrow dark street to the left, which skirts the banks of the Arno, and is still called the *Via dei Bardi*, revolving in his mind the above considerations, when he suddenly heard the tramping steps of the "*Bargello*" and his men, coming in the opposite direction up the lane, which running along the river banks to the right leads towards the Ponte Santa Trinita;—or rather to that spot on the river where the beautiful bridge so-called

now is; for in the thirteenth century none then existed there.

Now, if he had had presence of mind sufficient to think, and had simply slipped quietly into one of the dark corners at the bridge foot, the Florentine Dogberry and his myrmidons would doubtless have passed on their beat without noticing him. But Ippolito was too young a minion of the moon to be ready at any such foot-pad strategy. Struck with sudden panic, he did just the very worst thing he could have done under the circumstances;—started off in headlong flight down the Via dei Bardi. The attention of the patrol was of course instantly attracted to him; and the Bargello and his troop gave chase. Nevertheless, the start and his twenty years were all in favour of the fugitive; and he would in all probability have got clear off, had not his cap fallen as he ran. Now this cap was one of those long pudding-bag-like head-dresses, which in a somewhat less exaggerated form have remained in use among the southern Italians to the present day. And in its capacious bag Ippolito had unfortunately stowed his silken ladder.

Perhaps the cap was so marked as to have led to the discovery of its owner, if it had fallen into the hands of the police; perhaps he could not bring himself to abandon the ladder, and with it all hope of carrying off his bride that night. In any case, the fact was that instead of running on, he stooped to recover his cap; and before he could do so and make a fresh start, the patrol were upon him and he was captured.

While he was being led off to the prison popularly, then as ever since, called by the same name as the officer who presided over it, the Bargello, he had time to decide on the line of conduct it most behoved him to adopt; and the result of his reflections was a determination to represent himself as engaged in an intended robbery.

It is remarkable that he should not have preferred to declare—what was in every way so much more probable—that he was bound on one of those adventures of gallantry,

which at that day gave quite as much employment to silken ladders, as the equally lawless and more sordid pursuits of housebreaking. Was it, that it was so impossible to his own mind to imagine himself climbing to the chamber of any lady save one, that it seemed to him that Dianora must necessarily be compromised by an admission, that he was bound on any such business?

Be this as it may, on being questioned at the prison, Ippolito avowed that he was out on a housebreaking expedition; and said everything he could think of to give colour and consistency to the self-accusation.

“Justice,” if neither very certain, very accurate, nor very clear-sighted in her proceedings in those days, was apt, when she did act, to be remarkably sudden and summary in her doings. Florence was in a very disorderly state. Nightly outrages were constant. The citizens grumbled at the lack of security. It behoved the Guelph magistracy to conciliate the sympathies of the populace, among whom lay the strength of their faction, by showing themselves as ready to assert the majesty of the law against a patrician culprit, as against the poorest citizen. And in a word Ippolito Buondelmonti was on the morning following his capture, by virtue of his own confession, condemned to lose his head; even as the old rieving barons of Monteboni, his ancestors, had been condemned by the burghers of Florence two hundred years or so before.

His condemnation in no wise shook the gallant boy's determination to keep his and his love's secret, and carry it with him to the grave. He had the gratification of being sure, that at least Dianora would know why and for what sake he died a felon's death. But there was another—one other in the world—who would know his innocence of the crime laid to his charge, and understand the motive of his self-accusation,—his mother. Might it not be that she would rebel against his determination to preserve Dianora's fair fame at the cost not only of his life, but of his own good name? Might it not be that she would attempt to

prevent the consummation of the sacrifice by a declaration of all the truth? The agony with which he dwelt on this thought in the solitude of his cell, was rendered all the more acute from the consciousness that he should find it difficult to pardon the mother he loved so well, should she so act.

When justice struck in those days, as has been said, her blow was sudden; and Ippolito was to die at day-break on the next morning,—the next but one, that is, to the night of his misadventure.

It is needless to dwell on the effect produced in Casa Buondelmonti, and in Casa Bardi, as well as throughout the city, by the news of the crime and its punishment. To the world of the citizens in general, the matter was infinitely less surprising, less strange, and less terrible, than it is easy for us to imagine.

In Casa Buondelmonti of course there was great grief; and in one chamber of that house, an agony of misery and self-reproach that was indeed hard to bear.

In Casa Bardi, too, there was one chamber to which the tidings of the news of the city, that bright summer morning, brought a despair that was well-nigh mortal. The hours of long fruitless watch at her window that fatal night, while as the minutes grew into hours hope faded gradually into the certainty of some calamity, had been very dreadful to Dianora. Towards morning she had been forced by the necessity of concealing the manner in which her night had been spent, to get her to her bed, where she spent the slow-passing hours till the dawn in striving to imagine the causes, and calculate the consequences of the failure, which had evidently befallen Ippolito. Tremblingly she rose at the usual early hour, and furtively strove to read in the countenances of the members of the family any indications of a knowledge of that which was weighing on her heart. Then with the first home-comers from the morning mass arrived the news. Young Buondelmonti had been taken in the act of breaking into a house at the foot of the Ponte Vecchio by the Bargello;—would no doubt be condemned,

and would most likely have to die at sunrise on the morrow!

“A fair sample of your Guelph nobility! What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh! The cur was but taking after his kith and kin, the old felon Monteboni barons! Well for Florence if a score of the Guelph scum could be beheaded with him!”

This was the tenor of the remarks in Casa Bardi on the misfortune of the great Guelph family, to which Dianora had to listen from the mouths of her relatives. And all the truth of the matter flashed into her mind with the clearness of certainty. It was to save her name and fame, that that noble head was about to lay itself self-condemned on the block! Oh! that she could die for him, or if that might not be, with him! She had fancied she loved him well overnight, as she had sat rehearsing to herself all the anticipated incidents of the projected flight. But what was her affection then, to the intense passion of admiration, tenderness, and love, which now exclusively occupied her whole soul! And in the midst of her despair there was a gleam of lofty exultation at the thought that it was *such* a man who had loved and chosen her among all the maidens of Florence.

Meantime Ippolito, in his prison, had repeated his story of the motives of his conduct, doggedly refusing to answer further questioning; had received the sentence pronounced by the rough and ready Bargello justice of that lawless time; and was preparing to meet his fate with more of resignation and less of repugnance, than would have appeared possible to him a few short months ago. He was but falling back, he said to himself, to the same position in which he had been before the short gleam of delusive hope had beamed on him. And yet not the same position! Far, very far from it! He had been face to face with death then, as he was now. But to have died without having spoken his love! Was it nothing to have kindled the light of love in those eyes? And he had seen it kindle in them. He had been loved! He *was*

loved, and would be wept by her;—mayhap would be remembered! He was sustained too by the ennobling and supporting nature of the heroic act he was consummating. It is impossible for any human being, while engaged in the performance of any action of sublime virtue, to be wholly unhappy. To the soul so filled, the horizon bounded by time and space has already in some measure enlarged; and the hope and fears and wishes bounded by that horizon are already dwarfed by feelings, aims, and thoughts, which, by virtue of their own relation to the infinite, extend themselves far beyond it.

One hour of sharp trial, however, awaited the prisoner in his cell in the Bargello that morning.

About an hour before midday, the narrow prison door was opened, and his mother entered the squalid and noisome cell. A bright ray from the intense noon-tide sun streamed into the otherwise dark hole, through a small round opening in the thick wall, throwing a circle of light like that from the lens of a magnifying glass on the opposite wall, and showing the rest of the cell extra black, from the contrast with its deep shade. It was oppressively hot, and under any other circumstances, any inmate of that chamber would have sought to escape the burning and almost blinding sun-beam. But Ippolito, as his mother entered, sat full in the light of it. It was as a messenger from the warm, bright, beautiful world without; it was life, as contrasted with the black dull death of the living tomb, in which he was shut; and he was greedily wishful to lose none of it, during the brief term that remained to him. The golden ray was playing on the long wavy locks of his bright fair hair, as Monna Lisabetta entered; and was lighting up the features of the frank young countenance, which wore in brow, eye, and lip, the glory and enthusiasm of the exalted heroism that was burning with so pure a flame in his heart. His mother gazed on him with strangely mingled feelings of remorse, admiration, and maternal pride.

“Ippolito! my son, my son!” cried the poor mother, as

she threw herself forwards on her knees before him, and clasped his body in her arms; "my noble boy! This is what thy mother's counsel has brought thee to! This is my work! Canst thou look, my son, upon the mother, who has murdered thee? But thou wilt not persist in going to the scaffold! Thou wilt not visit my sin upon me so sorely! Thou wilt pardon thy mother's fault, my son, my own Ippolito! Thou wilt tell the real truth; and all may yet be well!"

Ippolito stooped forward till his forehead lay on that of his mother, and he placed his hands lovingly on her two shoulders as he said:—"Mother dear! Thou, and one other will know the cause for which I die; you cannot know the unspeakable happiness of dying for that cause! But surely you can figure to yourself the life-long agony of remorse and shame, that would be the meed of purchasing my life by destroying the good name of her who is dearer to me than a million lives. Would you own a son, dragging on a disgraced life under the ban of all good men's scorn, and that of his own conscience? Mother! I shall die so happy! And Dianora will know that she gave her love to one not wholly unworthy. Nor, let the future bring her what hap it may, will she ever forget him, whose love for her was destined to be fatal to him,—whether by slow heart-break, or the swift axe, what matters it,—save that the latter is preferable! Sweet mother! tell me that I have your blessing and your approbation in the death I die for the honour of her I love, and for my own!"

"My noble boy! In death as in life, when could thy wretched mother's blessing and admiration be wanting to thee? But how can I pardon myself—how ever atone for the ill-counsels which have brought my son to this pass? It is I,—I, thy mother, who have delivered thee to this death; I, thy mother, who consign thee to the headsman! Why, oh! why did I send thee forth on this fatal path?"

"Dearest mother! best and most loving that ever man was blessed with, your grief for my fate blinds you to the

truth of this matter. Look now, mother," he continued, raising her from her knees, and placing her on the one seat in the miserable cell, while he knelt on one knee by her side, with his arm encircling her waist. "Look now, mother! listen to the truth of this matter. I lay on a sick bed dying,—dying by a blow not less fatal, and far more cruel than that of the axe to-morrow. And I was dying with despair and misery untold in my heart, unblest by, unhoping the immense unspeakable happiness that is now mine. Why, mother, I have won *all*—all that life has best worth living for, thanks to your counsel and encouragement. Dianora's love is mine; wholly mine, now and for ever; and no headsmen's axe can take it from me. It may separate us for a brief space; but he who loves as I love, feels that such love is as immortal as the soul it dwells in,—that it is infinite in duration as in intensity. And this blessed happiness for time and for eternity, I owe to thee, my mother!"

"But thy father, my Ippolito? Thinkest thou that thy father will stand silent, to see his son go to a felon's death, that the honour of his enemy's house may be preserved?"

"Thou hast not told my father of our plans and hopes!" cried Ippolito in terror.

"I would not do so, my son, till I had spoken with thee myself, but"

"Nay! mother! this you must promise me!" interrupted he, seizing her hands, while the blood rushed red to his brow from the sudden excitement; "this has been a matter between you and me; and it must remain so even to the end. Truly, were my noble father induced to cast disgrace on the head of her who is my wife in the sight of heaven, by the vain and empty hope of saving my life, I should then indeed die the death of a felon, not in semblance, but in reality. *You* cannot suppose, my mother, that I could live a life so purchased! Your promise, my mother, that the sacred trust I confided to you, as I lay dying on my sick-bed, shall not be betrayed now or ever!

Your promise, mother; if you would have me die in peace and blessed hope!"

"It is hard, my son, very hard," sobbed the poor mother, "for a mother to know the innocence of her child, and see him led to death, for want of the word that should save him!"

"My mother!" said Ippolito, rising to his feet in his earnestness, and standing directly in front of her, as he spoke with calm solemnity; "the case is not such. For, mark me; should any word be said which should make known the true purpose with which I was in the streets yester night, I solemnly swear, that nothing should induce me to survive the foul disgrace! Then promise me, mother! Promise me, that you will be silent!"

And Monna Lisabetta gave her son the promise he thus pressed for.

"And now, my own mother," he said, "I have one favour more to ask in this world—and one only; and I trust to you to obtain it for me. I would fain look once again on Dianora's face before I die. Go then to the Bargello, and beg of him that the procession which conducts me to the place where I am to die, may pass through the Via dei Bardi. He will not refuse such a request from a dying man. Then find some means of sending word to Dianora—not from yourself or from anybody specially—that such is to be the case. Do this for me, my mother, and tell me, when you return, that it is to be so. You will return at nightfall, mother. The hour after the twenty-four was always our favourite time for converse between us two, you remember!"

And so Monna Lisabetta went out broken-hearted to do her Ippolito's last behest in this world.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SUCCESS.

VERY shortly after the early summer dawn, the little procession, composed of the Bargello and his men, together with a couple of priests, one on either side of the prisoner, issued from the sombre courtyard of the Bargello, and took their way through the streets to the place appointed for the execution. There were many persons in the streets at that early hour; for in the month of August, on the southern side of the Alps, it is the pleasantest of the day, and a short night is supplemented by a siesta during the noontide heat. It was the hour of the morning mass, too; and the streets consequently were as full of women as of men. There was no lack, therefore, of pitying eyes, and expressions of sympathy and commiseration, as the handsome young criminal passed, bareheaded, on his way to the scaffold. The nature of the crime attributed to him was of no effect to lessen or increase the popular sympathy; nor, let it have been what it might, would it have had any such effect. The impulsive southern nature pities and sympathises with present suffering. It is too little analytical, and lives too exclusively in the present, to be much influenced in its feelings by any consideration of the past causes of what it sees before it.

The petition of the prisoner had been granted without difficulty, and the line of his progress to the death-place had been so arranged as to pass over the Ponte Vecchio, and thence along the Via dei Bardi. The priests in attendance on the condemned man were chanting the penitential psalms as they walked on either side of him; and by the time the little procession had reached the northern foot of the Ponte Vecchio, a considerable number

of people were following in its wake, and joining in the melancholy wailing psalm-chants of the priests.

As it was out of the direct way from the prison to the place of execution to cross the bridge, it was whispered about among the crowd that the prisoner was being taken to the spot on which he had committed his crime, there to make confession and ask the pardon of those whom he had injured; and this notion, spread among the people, had the result of very considerably increasing the crowd, which had gathered behind the procession as it passed through the great square.

Slowly pacing,—the Bargello's pikemen first; then, between two priests, the prisoner, his bright long tresses glancing in the slanting morning sunbeams, and his clear blue eye looking out with unabashed glances, frank and serene, though grave in its expression; behind him the headsman, with his bared axe on his shoulder; and then more pikemen,—the procession, hemmed in and followed by the crowd, made its way between the lofty walls of the fortress dwellings that formed the narrow street.

The report that had spread itself among the people was, that the crime for which the prisoner was about to suffer had been committed at the foot of the Ponte Vecchio, and that it was accordingly thither that he was being brought to make his confession and ask the forgiveness of the person sinned against. But the bridge-foot was passed without anything of the kind taking place, and the people began to ask each other for what reason the criminal was conducted so far out of his natural route. The inmates of the grim old houses of the Via dei Bardi, too, began to throng the windows, as the swelling chant, upborne by the voices of a great number among the crowd, made itself heard along the whole length of the street.

Casa Bardi is at the further end of the street called after it; and it became known to the family there that the Buondelmonti who was being led to death was, for some reason, about to pass their doors, several minutes before the slow-moving array reached that part of the street.

One member of the family had, as the reader is aware, known beforehand that such would be the case, and was awaiting the moment of its passage, with a something in her manner and face very different from that which any one aware of all the circumstances of the case might have expected to see in them. One would have said that there was an expression of triumphant exultation mixed with the febrile restlessness with which she was expecting to see her lover for the last time. All this, however, could have been marked only by her chamber-women, who of course knew nothing of the fact that the death-procession was to pass by their street that morning; for Dianora had not yet left her chamber: and why their young mistress had chosen to array herself that day in all her most handsome and stately apparel, the puzzled abigails could not guess.

No delicacy of feeling, as it would be called in our day, prevented men in that century from openly showing and avowing the pleasure they took in the misfortune of an enemy. Men prided themselves on hating, and accepted all the results which grew from hatred. So the men of the Bardi, and the venerable Contessa Anna, had assembled to enjoy the spectacle which some unknown circumstances had provided for them, as soon as they knew that their enemy was to be led to death by that road.

There was in the centre of the palace a great hall on the first floor, which had on the outside of its central window a large balcony looking on to the street; and on the convenient vantage-ground thus afforded them, the octogenarian chief of the house, old Bardo, his two sons, his grandson Luigi, and the Contessa Anna, had already taken their places.

"This is a pretty summer-like pastime," said the old man, grimly, "that Master Bargello provides for us this pleasant morning? Does anyone know why the recreant caitiff is paraded through our street?"

"'Twas said," answered his grandson Luigi, "that he was to confess his crime on the spot where it was committed, at the bridge-foot; but nothing of the kind took

place, as one in the street told me but now. But for the great crowd, they would have been here by this time."

"Is there much people following?" asked his father, Vincenzo.

"The street is so full, father," answered the young man, "that the Bargello's men can hardly push their way through them!"

"Ay! and of course the scum of the people are all in favour of the prisoner. If a Ghibelline noble were to lay his head on the block, the hounds would follow him to the death with a different cry in their mouths," rejoined his father.

"And where is our Dianora?" asked the old Contessa Anna. "I trust that she means to come out to see the Guelph dog go to his dog's death. But really the girls now-a-days have so many maudlin nonsensical fancies, that I should not wonder if she professed to pity him. We used to feel differently in my day, I wot."

"Nay, mother," said her son Vincenzo, "she would be no daughter of mine if the sight of a Buondelmonti going to the block were not as good to her as shade in summer or fire in winter. We Bardi are chips of the old block, all of us!"

"Here comes my sister," said young Luigi, "and *per Bacco*, in all her *fiesta* bravery, too! Dianora has done more in honour of the occasion than any of us."

"Come hither, my child, beside me here," said her grandmother, who was standing in the middle of the large balcony; "and let thy young eyes mark well the countenance of the Guelph as he passes on the road that he will never come back, and tell me how he bears himself. My eyes are too dim to see the best of the sight."

They were too dim also to mark the nervous and excited, but yet lofty, bearing of her grand-daughter. And as the wail of the chant drew near, the men of the party were too intent on the drama about to be enacted before them to pay attention to her.

Slowly advancing amid the crowd, the little procession

came on in the order which has been described; and now the prisoner, bareheaded, alone, amid all those thronging around him, could be descried from the balcony of Casa Bardi. The knot of persons assembled in it could also be observed by the foremost of the crowd. And the appearance there of all the members of the well-known family served to confirm a notion which had got abroad among the people, that the reason why the prisoner was conducted by the circuitous route which his guards had chosen, was in some way connected with the family of the Bardi. Some said that he was brought that way at the instance of old Bardo Bardi, merely that he might enjoy the spectacle of the misfortune and humiliation of the family he hated so bitterly; and there was murmuring among the Guelph crowd at such a compliance on the part of the officers of justice with the caprices of the old Ghibelline patrician. Others declared that they knew, from a sure source, that the condemned man was led through the Via dei Bardi at his own special request. And as now nearly the whole of that street had been traversed without any incident that could account for such a desire on his part, it began to be surmised that it was his wish for some reason or other to pass before the residence of the well-known enemies of his family. Thus, as the procession, and the crowd which surrounded it, drew near to the dark and grim old palace, whose owners were seen gathered in front of it, there was an increased degree of excitement among the people, and a vague expectation that something of some kind or other was going to take place.

Not one among all that crowd of people had noted the group assembled in the Bardi balcony so soon as the man about to die. Already from a distance, as soon as ever the bend of the narrow street had made the Bardi palace visible, he had descried in the middle of the knot of enemies gathered with such ostentatious hostility in front of it, the form of her who filled all his thoughts; and the hope of seeing whom this once again on earth had been since his imprisonment the only thing for which life had any value to

him. There he saw her, conspicuous in a splendid dress of brilliant colour, standing by the side of the aged Contessa Anna, who was as usual dressed in black. Of course it was impossible for her to have ventured to assume any symbol of mourning for the occasion. But it did cross his mind that it was strange that she should have selected for this their last earthly meeting, an evidently gala costume.

Impossible for him to venture on any sign, or look even of intelligence, addressed to her there in the midst of her family. He could but continue to look up, as he had done throughout his death-progress, with calm and serene eye, and a countenance free from all expression of fear, or sorrow, or shame. As he thus came on he felt that it was almost impossible but that their eyes should meet; and a sudden fear came over him, lest by some uncontrollable impulse either one of them should betray the fatal secret, for the keeping of which he was about to die.

The feeling of expectation among the crowd that something was going to happen in connection with Casa Bardi, as well as the spectacle of all the members of that great family gathered there, with the beautiful and magnificently dressed girl in the centre of them, caused almost a pause in the progress of the procession, as it came immediately under the balcony.

Just at that juncture, and answering, as it were, to that sentiment of expectation, Dianora, advancing one step towards the front of the balcony with flashing eye and distended nostril, but deadly pale with emotion too great for blushes, said in a clear, silvery, ringing voice :

“ Noble Signor Bargello, and all ye citizens of Florence, I, Dianora dei Bardi, have a testimony to give in the matter of the prisoner Ippolito dei Buondelmonti’s guilt.”

At these words, the half-pause in the procession became a dead stop, and every eye was turned upwards to the balcony. The stupefaction of the Bardi was, as may be imagined, intense. The men started forwards, and pressed around her, but she waved them back with that lofty authority of look and gesture which a great and noble

purpose and highstrung will often enable one ordinarily submissive, to assume and exercise, and continued :

“It is difficult, Signori, for a maiden to bear witness thus publicly and uncalled on ; most difficult to give such testimony as I have to offer. But, with the knowledge of the facts which I possess, to hold my peace would be to have evermore the guilt of murder on my own soul,—would be a coward baseness unworthy of the name I bear ; and my noble father and honoured kinsmen would be the foremost to condemn and disown me. Hear me, then, and judge for yourselves, citizens of Florence.

“Ippolito dei Buondelmonti was taken by the night-watch in this street, having about him means for climbing to an upper window. On that circumstance, and on his own avowal, he has been condemned as a midnight robber. Such was his own declaration, nobly and generously false ! For I, Dianora dei Bardi, declare that his errand in the street the last night but one, was in accordance with an understanding and concerted plan to climb to the window of my chamber,—not to steal, Signori, but to receive, with her own most full consent and privity, a wife. To save my name and fame from the slanders of malicious tongues, he falsely accused himself, and is ready to go to the death. Should I do well, O citizens of Florence, to accept that sacrifice ? Do I not better and more worthily, O my honoured father, in coming here to demand that my good name shall be cared for, not by the shedding of the innocent blood of him who would have died for me, but by the completion of the promise I have made in the face of day and of all Florence ?

‘Why a Buondelmonti should come to carry home a Bardi for his wife after such prowling fashion, no citizen of Florence, alas ! needs be told. My hope—our hope—my promised husband’s and my own—was that by our union we should put an end to the vile senseless feud which is the ruin of our common country. Signori, let not that hope be vain. I am here a bride to claim the completion of the bridegroom’s promise.’”

Nothing short of an enthusiasm and excitement which lifted her quite out of her ordinary self, could have enabled Dianora to make this harangue; and the same state of mind, akin to that in which men and women too have walked triumphantly to the stake, still bore her up, as she stood undismayed before the assembled multitude, and awaited their decision on her appeal. Her kinsfolk in the balcony seemed utterly confounded with surprise and consternation. But the words of the beautiful girl had touched a chord in the popular heart, and the crowd signified its "adhesion" by a shout of applause that made the lofty walls on either side of the narrow street echo again.

But what were the feelings of the prisoner the while? He had looked up to the balcony, as she spoke, with an expression on his face, which would have sufficiently confirmed to any physiognomist the truth of the lady's statement. Nevertheless, it seemed, that he did not yet dare to hope that the generosity of his love would succeed in saving him without destroying herself. When the great shout had subsided, he placed his right hand on his heart, as he looked wistfully up to her, and said—

"Noble lady! your generous pity for one in my sad plight induces you ."

"Nay! Ser Cavaliere!" Dianora promptly interrupted him; "if, as you led me to believe, and as I still believe, without doubt, your plotted visit to my chamber was for no less honourable end than to make me your wife, a holy priest was that night prepared according to the plan agreed upon between us, to unite us in matrimony immediately on my escape. Now what is essential to my fair name, is that it should be proved that such *was* our intention; and for this purpose I demand the testimony of the priest. Ser Bargello, I pray that proclamation be made, that the priest so employed by Ippolito dei Buondelmonti, on that night, do come forward to give his testimony."

She had hardly finished speaking when a movement was perceptible at the furthest part of the crowd, which gradually advanced towards the centre of it, immediately

beneath the balcony ; and there disclosed its cause by evolving from the heaving mass of human heads the burly figure of a stalwart priest.

"*Eccomi quà !* Here I am!" he cried, panting with the exertion it had cost him to force himself through the crowd. "I am the man, noble lady; and I can give the testimony your ladyship requires. Most true it is that my services were demanded by the noble and illustrious gentleman, the Cavaliere Ippolito Buondelmonti, for the celebration of the holy sacrament of marriage, between himself and a noble lady; most true, that I was bidden to hold myself in readiness for that purpose on the night in question; and above all most true, that I remained in the chapel of St. Agnes six mortal hours awaiting him, who never came, the more by token that I was fain for very weariness to read the litany of the Virgin to pass the time! Thus much can I, Giovanni da Ripoli, clerk, testify on oath."

Thereupon the "*vox populi*" was uplifted again in a chorus of cries, which showed that the romance of the circumstance had touched the popular heart.

"To the palace! to the palace!" as the seat of the republican government was called. "The prisoner is innocent! Long live the Buondelmonti! Long live the Bardi! A Buondelmonti and a Bardi! Ippolito and Dianora! Peace and union in Florence! To the palace! to the palace!"

And the Bargello and his prisoner, escorted by the crowd, began to retrace their way, in compliance with the voice that was sovereign in Florence in those days.

"A Bardi! a Bardi! Dianora the peacemaker in Florence! To the palace!" cried a mass of people around the balcony. And what could the Bardi do but obey, with the best grace they might, the behest of the same high authority?

And as the news of the story was spread from mouth to mouth, the crowd rapidly increased; and by the time Ippolito and his guard had again reached the Palazzo,

which he had left that morning thinking never to return to it, nearly the whole of the principal citizens were collected there; and the enthusiasm, which the circumstances were so well calculated to excite, becoming, as it is the nature of enthusiasm to do, contagious, and intensified by the contagion, Ippolito dei Buondelmonti and Dianora dei Bardi were joined together in holy wedlock, there and then, before the face of all Florence; and the heads of the two great rival families found themselves obliged, by the strong current of the aroused popular feeling, to let their feud then and there die and (for the nonce) be forgotten. And though general peace and good-will in Florence assuredly did not result therefrom, as folks in the excitement of the moment declared would and should be the case, yet the happiness of one couple was at all events assured; and Ippolito and Dianora lived happy ever afterwards, according to the consummation which it was promised that this exceptional but true tale of mediæval Florentine life should reach.

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"Mr. Trollope's last work may perhaps be a favourite with its author, for he tells us that he has had the story of it before his mind for many years, and that he has decided that the question asked in the title, 'Can You Forgive Her?' ought to be answered in the affirmative. The lady about whose forgiveness the public is thus questioned is a Miss Vavasor, and the offence for which pardon is needed is the heinous one of having been foolish enough to jilt a very estimable, though somewhat too perfect, gentleman. In fact, for Mr. Trollope's purposes she is made rather an adept in the art, as she breaks an engagement with one man twice, and another once, before she is finally married to the latter of the two. We shall not unravel the plot of the story further than to remark, that in no case is the 'jilting' process brought about, as is probably most usual in real life, by another attachment; and that though there are, no doubt, excellent reasons given for her breaking with her cousin George—the rascal of the piece—once and again, there is really no satisfactory cause assigned by Mr. Trollope for her giving up the admirable Mr. Grey, or for her second acceptance of George in his place."

—o—

The Knight of Gwynne.

A TALE OF THE TIME OF THE UNION.

By Charles Lever.

"The 'Knight of Gwynne' is certainly one of the most lovable characters that Mr. Lever has ever drawn; and he monopolises so much of our sympathy, that we hope to be forgiven for extending less of it than he probably deserves to Baginval Daly, notwithstanding the vigour with which that character is drawn, the remarkable originality of it, and the fidelity with which it represents and sustains a most peculiar combination of qualities, intellectual as well as moral."—*Blackwood's Magazine*.

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